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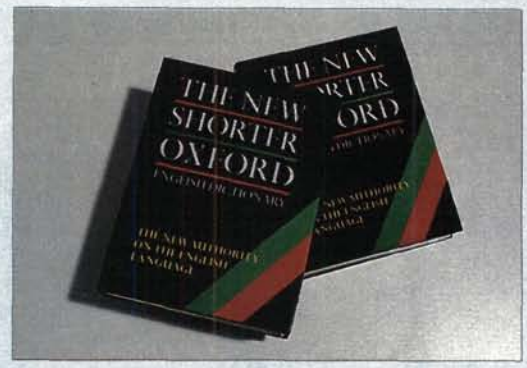

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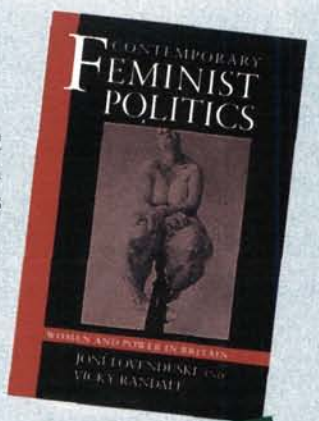

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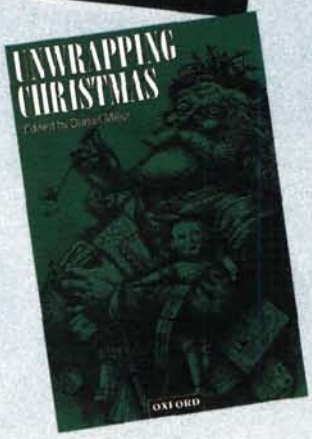

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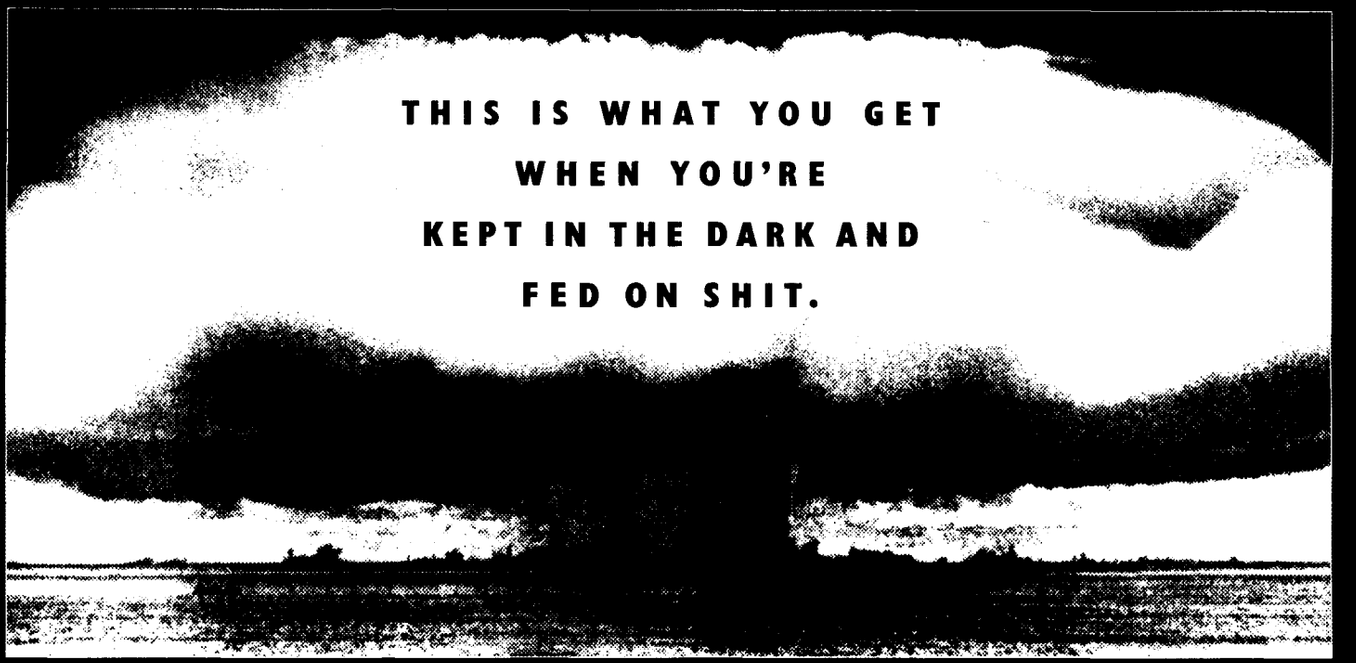

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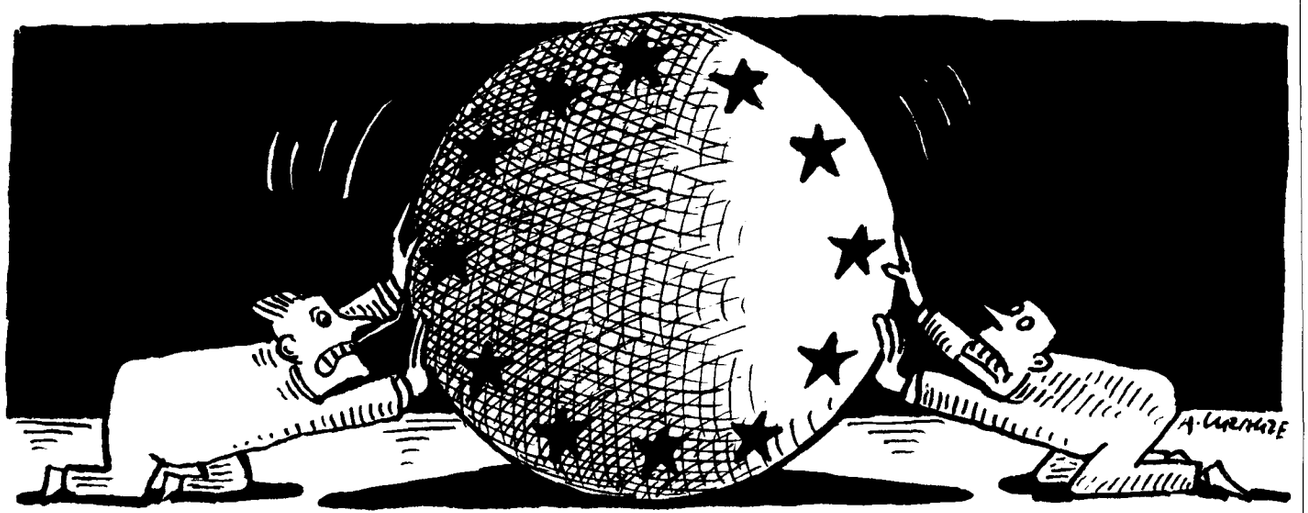

A step in the right direction

This week's European summit will see the first exchanges of fire in what promises to be a gruelling battle over the economic and social role of the European Union.

The protagonists are already well entrenched. On one side are the forces of light—the followers of European Commission president Jacques Delors, whose imaginative white paper on competitiveness, growth and unemployment will be discussed in Brussels. Delors believes that Europe, with 20 million out of work already, is facing ever-increasing unemployment unless there is concerted Europe-wide intervention to create jobs. The white paper, *Tackling the Challenges and Moving into the 21st Century*, proposes a package of measures for infrastructural investment (in communications—both information technology and transport—and energy), research and development, and the skills of the workforce. On information technology, Delors suggests EU spending of Ecu20 billion (£15 billion) a year for the rest of the 1990s; on transport and energy, his target is Ecu250 billion (£190 billion) of investment by the end of the century.

Instead of cutting wages and pruning unemployment benefits to "price people into jobs", Delors argues for a "European social pact" whereby unions agree that gains from increased productivity should be ploughed back into investment. Workers should be given the opportunity of retraining throughout their lives. Meanwhile, new types of enterprise should be created between public and private sectors to develop a new "social economy", producing socially useful non-commercial goods and services (such as inner-city renovation, home helps for the elderly, child-care for working mothers and so on) and creating some three million jobs.

Ranged against Delors and the interventionists are the usual suspects: the British government and Unice, the European employers' confederation. They believe that the key to European economic recovery is labour market deregulation and reduced employment costs. Unice's report, *Making Britain More Competitive*, published on Tuesday, calls for cuts in employers' social security contributions for young and low-paid workers and relaxation of rules on maximum working hours, minimum wages and making workers redundant. The ideological affinity with the Tory policies that have done such damage in the past 14 years in Britain is striking.

The stark difference between the two approaches to EU economic and social policies makes it almost inconceivable that this week's summit will reach any consensus—and, in the short term at least, the predominance of right-wing governments among EU members means that the best that Delors can hope for is a request to put his proposals in more detail. Although he has the backing of the Belgian EU Presidency, the EU's big guns—Germany, France, Italy and Britain—are either worried about the costs of his proposals or (in the case of Britain) vehemently opposed on dogmatic grounds.

In the longer run, however, the prospects for something like the Delors plan being put into practice are rather better. To begin with, his proposals are not in fact far removed from what the mainstream European Christian Democratic right would *like* to do: the reason that German Chancellor Helmut Kohl is currently unenthusiastic about them has less to do with ideology than with the burden of debt with which reunification has saddled his country. An improvement in Germany's economy, expected some time in the next 18 months, could work wonders for Christian Democrat dithering over the Delors plan, although its author might well have retired by then.

Just as important, the political balance in the EU is by no means set in stone. Both Italy and Germany face general elections in the coming year that seem likely, as things currently stand, to result in left-leaning coalitions coming to power.

Last weekend's Italian local elections show that the former-communist Party of the Democratic Left (PDS) is now the only coherent national political force: just about every political commentator reckons that it is set to be the core of the government that takes office after elections likely in the spring. In Germany, although the Social Democrats (SPD) are not performing as well as they would like, the popularity of Chancellor Kohl's Christian Democratic Union has plummeted, particularly in the east of the country, and the smart money is on an SPD-CDU "Grand Coalition" taking power next autumn. With both PDS and SPD in government, the *laissez-faire* labour market deregulation approach so beloved of the British Tories will have far less purchase.

Of course, this cannot be taken for granted: expectations of shifts to the left in Europe have all too often been dashed in recent years, and a Franco-British *laissez-faire* bloc could seriously damage the prospects of the Delors plan even with left-leaning governments in Germany and Italy. Neither should anyone underestimate the widespread fear in the European establishment that, faced with growing competition from the newly industrialising countries of the far east, Europe has no option but to cut wages and employment costs by any means necessary.

But at least there are grounds for cautious optimism. The Delors plan is far from perfect. It falls well short of the sort of counter-cyclical Keynesian expansionism that Europe so badly needs, and it does nothing to address the democratic deficit in EU macro-economic policy-making: it is designed to be implemented by the unelected Commission after approval in secretive intergovernmental bodies. Nevertheless, it is a crucial first step towards the pan-European pro-growth macro-economic policy that is our only hope of tackling unemployment. As such it deserves all the support the left can give it.

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Of Archdeacons and arch-hypocrisies

So the Archdeacon of York, the Venerable (what sort of title is that?) George Austin, has suggested that Charles may not be fit to be king because of his alleged dalliance with a lady named Camilla. Not fit to be *what*? Our George must not simply be venerable but suffering from terminal amnesia.

He presumably represents a different Church of England from that which actively connived in the serial matrimony of Henry VIII. Different too, from the ecclesiastical establishment that looked on fondly as the restored King Charles II humped and bumped his way to a share in the UK record for royal bastardy—an estimated 20, several of whom were created dukes—but, alas, he never managed one on the right side of the blanket. (He shares the record with his brother, James II, but he was a Catholic).

There cannot, of course, be any connection between the present Church of England and the one that crowned George IV, sharer of the most flamboyant love nest in the land, the Brighton Pavilion, while his estranged wife (and Queen), Caroline, herself fresh from hanky panky in the Mediterranean (now where have we heard that before?), banged on the abbey door for admittance. Nor too, with the CofE which so admired the antics of Edward VII, who on his own admission had bedded the wives of a fair proportion of the British aristocracy, as well as numerous singers and actresses. Then there were the Georges, I, II and III, William III, and Edward VIII, to all of whom a mistress or two was a perk of royalty, not to mention Edward VII's son, Eddie, who may, or may not, have inspired Jack the Ripper.

George, George *puhlease!* Who do you think you are kidding? Royalty has always been at it and the Church, which has (until now, at least) always known which side its bread is buttered, has kept very mum indeed. What now are the rest of us supposed to make of this piffling, ungrateful snap at those hands which through the centuries have stuffed the richest of fodder down the ever-open maws of clerics?

Look at the pictures of any coronation and see them there, the gilt-encrusted episcopacy, fawning and simpering in mock solemnity as they conspire with the "Defender of the Faith" in a religious charade that makes fools of us all. It's a tough job, but somebody's got to do it, and the C of E, free as it is of almost any theological baggage, has always been ideally suited to the task. For every Cranmer who, finally, could take no more doctrinal somersaults, there are always a dozen vicars, deacons, archdeacons, bishops and archbishops of Bray with suppler consciences.

And what of the object of the Venerable George's attentions, our very own Anglo-Saxon (actually, Helleno-Teutonic) rock on which the church, Camilla notwithstanding, may possibly be built so none shall prevail against it? Not a bad chap really, unexceptionable views on architecture and the environment, distressing tendency (for some) towards social democracy—in short, an ideal chair of a rural county council. But king? Apex of the British constitution, sanctified by the lugubrious legions of the Church? What sort of country is it where the choice of head of state can be affected by the witterings of a clerical nonentity on the tacky contents of illegal eavesdropping? What sort of people are we that we allow this collection of overbred ciphers and ecclesiastical buffoons any role at all in the way we govern ourselves. Get rid of the lot.

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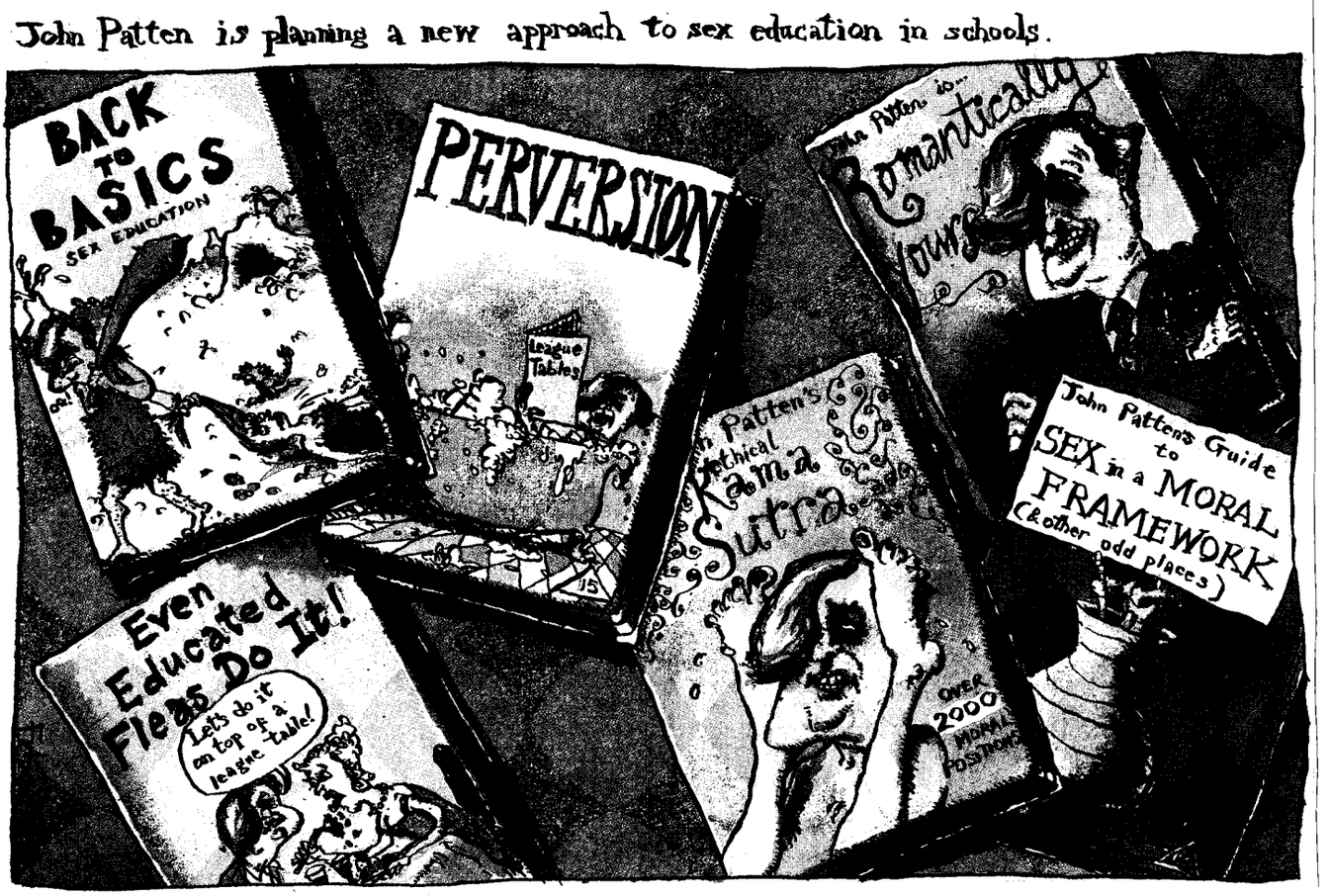
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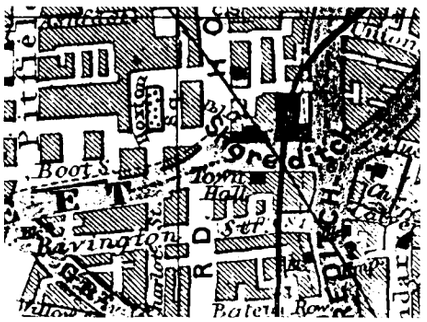

London's swish Dorchester hotel was the place to be earlier this week to hear Henry Kissinger, former US secretary of state and now chair of the US World Cup Organising Committee, give his views on matters of world historical importance to a hand-picked audience of British worthies. England's elimination from the forthcoming festival of football was a matter of considerable regret to him—and to the citizens of Los Angeles, who were to have been host to our boys and their troublesome fellow travellers. The LA police had already sent a reconnaissance party to London to spy on the dreaded English hooligans, and had reported that, compared to the street gangs of south-central LA, they were "amateurs" (rather like our footballers). Should the UK's representation on the UN Security Council go the same way as its soccer teams, asked a member of the audience? Kissinger was, needless to say, diplomatic. On balance, the UK should stay, with Germany and Japan also joining, although without power of veto for at least five years.

Shoreditch is a firm believer in the tenet that if the City is in favour of something, as seen when the stock market soared after Ken Clarke's magic budget (now you see the deficit, now you don't), the rest of us should check our wallets. But further proof, if any were needed, that the boys and girls in the dealing rooms provide a less than reliable index of whether happy days are here again comes in the form of the budget analysis produced by the City bank UBS. The cover shows our Ken trumpeting "Hey, big spender". And there we were thinking he'd raised taxes and cut public spending.

Straws in the wind suggest that the language of Back to Basics may not be entirely compatible with Citizen's Charter-speak. This week's annual inspectors' report on the state of the nation's schools asked whether enough was being done for children's "spiritual development". Chief inspector Professor Stewart Sutherland revealed that schools were finding it "very difficult" to define what spiritual development was, and even harder to know how to foster it. But the professor (author of *God, Jesus and Belief*, *The World's Religions*, and *The Philosophical Frontiers of Christian Theology*) said he could see that teachers might find it tricky to assess their competence in matters of the soul. "Spiritual development doesn't lend itself to performance indicators," he conceded.

"A unique Christmas idea for your readers," promises an invitation received by Shoreditch this week. No, not Damart's thermal underwear again (see Shoreditch, 19 November). It's flotation tanks this time: "Floatation [sic] works for everyone, young and old, fat and thin, believers and sceptics. Give one of your hardworking reporters a treat, get them to try some float sessions and report on them." The highly resistible offer goes on to explain that the "deep state of relaxation" induced by sitting in a bath full of tepid salt water "helps balance the right and left side of the brain". With this in mind, Shoreditch has passed the invitation on to those hardworking reporters at the Sun.

Yet more consumer news: Shoreditch feels it should pass on the results of a survey in the December issue of *Which?* to all readers who have to buy presents for small children at Christmas. If you shop around at places like Argus, John Lewis, Debenhams, Children's World, Woolworths or Toys R Us, you could pay as little as £9.24 for Scrabble, £8.94 for Monopoly, £41.99 for a Grandstand First Talking Computer, £19.94 for a Meccano Beginners Set, £59.97 for a Fisher Price Mini Chef, £25.65 for Sindy's Make-up Counter (if you're so un-PC as to buy one) and £22.49 for a V-Tech Little Talking Scholar: a total of £188.22. In Hamleys, the most expensive shop the magazine could find (including Harrods), those same items would cost you a staggering £301.93. Not surprisingly, the *Which?* team inquired tactfully whether there was an explanation for this huge discrepancy. Hamleys, apparently, "don't set out to compete on price", but aim to offer customers "a special and memorable shopping experience". Possibly at the moment it comes to pay the bill.

After taking BNFL at its word (that it is only interested in conducting decent, scientific arguments), Shoreditch dipped its feet in the water last week by asking how the company justified reprocessing spent nuclear fuel, when the amount of nuclear waste left over after reprocessing is so much greater than the original volume waiting to be reprocessed. Why not just dispose of the smaller amount in the first place, a cheaper process into the bargain?

A kindly man from BNFL has now written to put us right: "Recycling the recovered uranium . . . from reprocessing avoids further mining, refining and enrichment of uranium with an associated elimination of wastes which would have otherwise have arisen from these processes. Indeed, when these wastes are considered, reprocessing produces less total waste volume . . . "

A good try . . . if the recovered uranium was actually going to be reused. However, due to the notoriously poor quality of recovered uranium, most of it won't be. So, the mining will continue, whatever happens to the waste. Shoreditch is still waiting for an answer.

FOURTH ESTATE

A regular monitor of the tabloid press

2 December: Sighs of relief all round. At last, reports the *Sun*, "The Major is back in command." A "sudden and decisive change of mood" has transformed the Tories into "a potentially lethal political fighting force". What's more, John Smith knows the game is up. It was obvious from his Budget face, apparently, that he sees his chances of becoming Prime Minister "slipping away"—not least because of the brilliant diplomatic coup the PM is about to pull off by making the IRA lay down their arms . . .

3 December: The *Daily Express*, less sanguine, is fretting about the economic outlook for struggling southerners. Under the splash "Council tax bills to soar", it warns that those all-important citizens in the south of England are to suffer a double blow: an above-inflation increase and the loss of "transitional relief" (that's feather-bedding to you and me).

4 December: "Charles forced Diana to go," claims the *Sun*. But her husband's cruelty is as nothing compared with the pernicious influence of "those moral midgets" at the *Mirror*. "The *Mirror*'s sickening pictures were the last straw that destroyed the best-loved of the royals," rants an editorial, praising Diana's "saint-like qualities".

The *Daily Mirror*'s own headline? "DIANA—we'll leave her alone," it promises, before adding: "See pages 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 24 and 25."

Chris Buckland, writing in the *Daily Express*, reports that post-Budget Westminster is accusing John Smith of being "asleep on the job". The Labour leader is said to be freezing out those "bright young hopes", Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, and hanging out with radical tearaways like Robin Cook and John Prescott. Buckland reads this as Smith's bid "to live down his right-wing credentials by pandering to the left in an orgy of political correctness".

5 December: "Happy now Charles?" demands the *People*, while the *Mail on Sunday* suggests what the penalty might be: "31 per cent want William as King." The *Sunday Mirror* coyly hints that Diana's reason for wanting more time to herself is the the existence of "a special friend".

6 December: Nonsense, retorts Nigel Dempster in the *Daily Mail*. "There is no man, new or old, in the romantic life of the Princess of Wales." Instead, claims the *Mail*, Diana will adopt "a dynamic new role on the international stage" as a charity frontperson.

7 December: Sniping between the *Sun* and the *Mirror* intensifies. According to the *Sun*, the Archbishop of Canterbury feels that Charles's affair with Camilla Parker Bowles makes him unfit to be king. "Lies, all lies," shrieks the *Mirror*, which has the Archbishop denouncing the story as "pure fabrication". Alas that the Church should be dragged into these sordid circulation wars.

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Sean French offers a tip to comics who stop being funny

I feel a certain interest in the recent success of French and Saunders, the hit TV shows, the West End plays, the interviews. This is not, incidentally, because of any blood ties. Once or twice I have been asked whether Dawn French is my sister, which conjures up the bizarre image of two siblings called Dawn and Sean, with perhaps our sister, Fawn, and not to forget the little baby, Lorne. So let me confirm that we are not related. She comes from a military family. My paternal grandfather's wartime service was principally as a black marketeer. I'm one of the few people who identify with the James Beck character when I watch repeats of *Dad's Army*. (It was eerie a couple of days ago to see Clive Dunn on a TV show playing the Corporal once more. Only, now he has finally reached the actual age of the character, he's less good at playing it. In the same way, the experience of watching *Citizen Kane* has changed, now we know what Orson Welles and Joseph Cotten looked like when they really were old.)

I'm usually slow to jump on to bandwagons but I did go to the Comic Strip in its early days in 1979, when it was a club perched uneasily in Raymond's Revuebar. The show was MCd by a fairly alarming Alexei Sayle. He began by announcing: "We're alternative comedians. That means we're not fucking funny." In the case of French and Saunders, this was entirely true. Their only point seemed to be an updating of Dr Johnson's famous gibe about a woman preaching being like a dog walking on its hind legs: "It is not done well, but one is surprised to see it done at all." In that sense they were the most purely political part of the show. Their participation was making a point about the complete absence of female comic performers in English showbusiness. Before French and Saunders, the women in comic teams were someone like Barbara Windsor, with big breasts, or that poor woman Carol Cleveland in *Monty Python*.

If French and Saunders seemed like two middle-class drama students trapped in a failed improvisation, if the only area of disagreement concerning their performance was whether they or their audience were having a worse time, well, that was to do with problems of society. Merely to include two female comedians was part of the point; to include two useless female comedians only made the point more strongly. They always seemed like nice people, but then *I'm* a nice person and you should see me on stage. In my extremely rare theatrical performances (one, at school), I displayed a charisma and charm that could only be compared with the taped confession of a serial killer, but without the laughs.

It's worth remembering the original Comic Strip team. At the time, the two obvious stars were Sayle and Rik Mayall. Sayle still seems a remarkable talent, brutally funny, intelligent, but also an outstanding actor who has yet to be properly used. Mayall, by contrast, has done nothing in the past ten years but rehash the mugging and slapstick that was already played for more than it was worth in *The Young Ones*. If there is anybody out there who finds Mayall's and Adrian Edmondson's series *Bottom* funny, please write and let me know because I would be genuinely interested. To me, even the canned laughter seems a bit strained.

History shows that it is terribly difficult to sustain a career as a comedian, especially on screen. Laurel and Hardy did virtually all their significant work between 1928 and 1936, after which they suffered a sad decline. The great days of the Marx Brothers were even shorter, arguably just the four masterpieces from *Monkey Business* in 1931, via *Horse Feathers* and *Duck Soup*, to *A Night at the Opera* in 1935.

And there is something peculiarly painful about witnessing the fall of a comic talent. The trouble with Mel Brooks' recent disaster, *Life Stinks*, was more than simply not being funny. Brooks, as star, director and writer, was like a musician who was suddenly tone-deaf, yet still attempting, pedantically and self-consciously, to emulate what he could once do instinctively. And this was a man who was once plausibly described by Kenneth Tynan as the most brilliant comic improviser he had ever seen.

So, I thought French and Saunders were untalented when I first saw them, and I thought they were crap when I first saw them on television, in the early Comic Strip films, and in occasional appearances on *The Young Ones* and elsewhere. Then, in a rather satisfying way, they gradually became good. There were odd occasions—Saunders as Meryl Streep in *Strike!*, the only Comic Strip film I've seen that was genuinely first-rate; French making a parodic appearance in *The South Bank Show* documentary about her husband, Lenny Henry—where I surprised myself by thinking, hang on, that wasn't too bad. Then, suddenly, in their TV show they seemed like professional comic performers.

The next crucial stage is to become serious actresses, like Emma Thompson (also crap in her one appearance on *The Young Ones*). The reason for this is that when you stop being funny as a comic performer, audiences can't help noticing that they're not laughing any more. If your talent for Shakespeare declines, hardly anybody can tell the difference and you're likely to get away with it.

There is something providential about the current repeat of the classic TV series, Civilisation, narrated by Kenneth Clark. As I watched it I couldn't help conjuring up imaginary *NSS* competitions in which Lord Clark of Civilisation delivered the budget speech and Kenneth Clarke, beer in hand, panatella in corner of mouth, gave us his no-nonsense, man-of-the-people account of the rise of western culture.

But these visions were ousted by the even more delirious prospect of Alan Clark performing either function or, more enticing still, there is the book that Clark actually intended to write. If we could retrieve one great lost work of English literature, what would it be? Byron's memoirs, perhaps, burned by his executors, or the uncompleted section of Dickens' *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, of which we were deprived by his death, or the early short stories of Ernest Hemingway, lost on a train by his first wife, Hadley.

But possibly more tempting than all of these is the version of Mrs Thatcher's memoirs, that Alan Clark offered to ghost, almost the only non-sexual proposition that he records in his recently published diaries. Tragically he was turned down, so we lack Clark's version of Mrs Thatcher's first meeting with President Reagan: "Clearly outlined in the tight groin of his jeans, I noticed his delightful balls bouncing up and down. I whispered to him an invitation to step outside on to the balcony. 'Half past seven,' he replied."

Unfortunately, the budget was actually delivered by Kenneth Clarke. Whatever the grim failings of the measures themselves, however, there was one admirable aspect that the Chancellor addressed at the press conference on the following day, when he was asked what his measures to help lone parents and his reduction of tax relief for married couples was doing to support family values. He replied that everybody supported family values, but that the "day-to-day practicalities of politics had to deal with society as it was". Our society was changing, but: "I do not think we should use things like the welfare state as an instrument for trying to move those changes in any particular direction."

In the past few days, Clarke has been denounced for his cynicism, but if this is true then it is at least arguable that cynicism can be a useful quality in a politician. Many of the most dangerous politicians are those fired by sincerity, ideology, even, on occasion, by compassion. Northern Ireland, for example, could do with a few more Kenneth Clarkes who were more interested in cobbling together an imperfect solution than immolating themselves on a pyre of principle.

Our own society will be better served by Clarke's feckless unconcern than it would be by Peter Lilley's busy attempts to use the law and market forces to make us all virtuous.

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Time for some nursery economics

"A mind that saw everything in pictures clashed with one that saw everything in figures; emotion was brought daily to earth by calculation."

This sentence, taken from the *Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Reginald McKenna, chancellor of the exchequer in the desperate mid-years of the first world war, encapsulates the quarrel between McKenna's Treasury and its former chief, Lloyd George, by then engaged as minister of munitions on his crusade to provide the sinews of war.

We need not become bogged down in this arcane quarrel, except in so far as it illuminates that darkest—and brightest—of Whitehall departments, the Treasury. As described in Robert Skidelsky's biography of Keynes, the limitations on its undoubted brilliance were visible even so long ago, and at a time of great national peril.

Briefly, the quarrel was this: the Treasury had a well-defined position, called "discrimination", which meant that there were not enough resources to go round, so the government must choose whether to raise large armies, produce shells, or manufacture goods for export. McKenna wanted to "discriminate" in favour of exports, for fear that the United States, then not yet in the war, would distrust the solvency of Britain and its allies.

Keynes, who with characteristic loftiness had declared that Lloyd George "never had the faintest idea of the meaning of money" went along with this argument. (As an already arrogant temporary civil servant, the great economist was far from being as heterodox as he later became.) But Skidelsky records the contrary case: "Lloyd George tended to pooh-pooh such arguments. There were more resources available, he claimed, than the Treasury believed. For example, women could be drawn into war work; and the Americans would always provide credit in their own interest.

"In the event, Lloyd George was usually proved right and the Treasury wrong. The Treasury's calculations . . . (were that) . . . there was so much productive capacity, so much gold, so many foreign securities. If you tried to do more of one thing, you had to do less of another. This way of looking at things was deeply ingrained in the Treasury's thinking. Government spending was always alternative to something else—usually something more desirable."

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. "Something more desirable", like eliminating the public deficit. Now some of my best friends believe in balanced budgets, and if it is of any comfort to Barclaycard and the Thatcher School of Household Economics, it is the principle I apply in my personal affairs. Yes, it is daft that interest on the national debt is now one of Whitehall's major spending programmes. But surely the parable of the penny-pinching McKenna and Lloyd George, the Welsh genius who eventually won the great war, has a lesson for us today.

The assumption that the resources to be disposed of by this or any other nation are finite leads inevitably on to sterile debate about the respective demerits of shells against exports, or higher taxes against cuts in public expenditure. Yet surely it does not take the wisdom of "some long-dead economist" to deduce that, if you have almost three million people not working, drawing benefit, and not paying income tax, the national treasury will be poorer than if they were all employed. And there are associated problems, just as important as the public deficit, which have to be resolved before the recession that caused it can be cured.

It is now obvious that domestic demand in Britain will not recover while so many people are out of jobs

For it is now obvious that domestic demand in Britain will not recover while so many people are either out of a job, fearful of being so, or working on such short-term contracts, or for such small wages, that they are reluctant to spend what they have. A subjugated labour market may seem like good supply-side economics, but it does not revive markets for goods, services or houses.

Henry Ford the First was operating on the economics of common sense when he concluded that he was unlikely to sell enough Model T Fords to sustain mass production unless he and other employers paid large enough wages to allow their workers to buy what were then still regarded as luxury items.

It is just possible that Kenneth Clarke, as an economic iconoclast, may be the man to make the Treasury engage with such issues. The present Chancellor is the first holder of that post for some time who does not appear to think that unemployment is a force of nature not susceptible to man's puny efforts. Whether he will succeed in doing anything about it is quite another matter.

But at least his change in attitude may make the debate with the Labour opposition more interesting. John Smith and Gordon Brown have been beavering away for years about investment, infrastructure and training, but they have not been successful in disengaging the minds of the popular press from juicier questions about Labour's taxation and spending plans; while the economic press has become so obsessed with either monetary aggregates or the sexier bits of labour market management that it seems to regard employment as a boring residual.

Surely employment is the key economic factor, as well as being politically important. Before we become too racked by anxiety about how many pensioners there will be compared with the number of workers in 2020AD, would it not be wise to worry about the disequilibrium between taxpayers and benefit-drawers in 1993? And to remember that there are two ways of dealing with this: to cut the number of people receiving benefits, and the amounts they receive: for example, by redefining people as incapacitated or job seekers; or by getting more people back to work.

If this seems like the economics of the kindergarten—as my former colleague, Peter Jay, once unkindly characterised some views of mine on a single European currency—well, I have always felt Britain suffers from a shortage of nursery places. And lest it be thought that this attempt to spell out some currently unfashionable fundamentals of our national malaise conceals a generally simplistic view of that malaise, let me declare a belief that if/when unemployment is cured, our economic solutions will only have begun.

For what the labour market changes of the Thatcher years utterly failed to solve is the chronic problem of British economics since the second world war: that no government has found a permanent, or even long-lasting, way to run the economy at a high level of activity without drifting into a self-destructive inflation. It is no great achievement for the present administration to have reduced inflation to its lowest level for many years, considering that we are still suffering from the worst recession since the thirties.

What Thatcherism has done is to spread a poultice over the problems of the British labour market, not cure the underlying disease. That disease remains what it has been since Stafford Cripps' time at the Treasury in the forties: a propensity to pay ourselves more than we produce. This would return, as night follows day, if the economy ever returned to full employment. It is a problem that Smith and Brown would have to face, as surely as Major and Clarke will.

That is, if real recovery comes.

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Victory for Italian left

As the results of the second round of Italy's local government elections poured in on Sunday night, there was a telling absence from the television studios. In more than four hours of live commentary on the results, not a single representative of the centre-right government parties made an appearance.

It is easy to see why the Christian Democrats, Socialists and their allies did not want to face the cameras. They were mere spectators as electoral alliances forged by the former-communist Party of the Democratic Left (PDS) won sweeping gains throughout the country.

Most significantly, PDS-backed candidates won the mayoral contests in the five major cities holding elections, beating off both the neo-fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) in Naples, Rome and Trieste and the autonomist Northern League in Genoa and Venice.

The result is the best left performance since the peak of the Communist Party (PCI) in the mid-1970s and leaves the PDS as the only credible national political party. At the same time, however, everyone knows that the left's success cannot be put down to a surge of enthusiasm for the PDS.

First, the party itself topped the poll in very few of the 100-plus councils up for grabs: the left's successes were very much a matter of skilful construction of alliances of what the PDS calls "progressive forces". And, second, the left was undoubtedly the beneficiary of a significant number of votes from extremely unenthusiastic former supporters of the discredited government parties who simply found the MSI and Northern League too distasteful. The left owes its victories to a combination of good tactics and the absence of a credible centre-right.

Not that the performances of the League and the MSI give any grounds for complacency. Despite its failures in Genoa and Venice, matched by poor performances in towns around Turin, the League did well in Lombardy. More worryingly, the MSI took a far higher percentage of the vote in the major cities than had been expected, and won several southern provincial cities into the bargain.

The reason is simple: the MSI got the support both of a substantial number of former DC voters unwilling (or, in many contests, unable) to vote for their besmirched party and of a substantial part of the DC party machine. In Rome, the backing given to the MSI's national secretary, Gianfranco Fini, by the most notoriously corrupt parts of the DC was particularly overt.

The rise of the MSI could well be merely temporary—but it has been given a real boost by a series of setbacks suffered in the past fortnight by those politicians who appeared

to be emerging as a "new" centre-right. First, Giuliano Amato, the former prime minister widely considered to be one of the very few "clean" Socialists, was called as a witness in the first major corruption trial in Milan to explain his role as treasury minister during the so-called Enimont scandal—when large backhanders, funded by the tax-payer, were paid to politicians during the demerger of the state-owned petrochemicals giant Eni and the private chemical company Montedison. Then media magnate Silvio Burlusconi, widely touted as a sponsor of the new "clean" centre, despite his friendship with former prime minister Bettino Craxi, made the extraordinary *faux pas* of backing the MSI in Rome.

Next, Giorgio La Malfa, former secretary of the Republican Party and industry's favourite "clean" economically competent political leader, admitted taking 300 million lira (£130,000) in illegal donations from the Enimont slush fund. And, finally, Mario Segni, whose break from the DC last year was heralded as the basis for a new centre party in the south, has apparently returned to the DC fold after the PDS refused to accept his price for offering the left his support.

What happens next is unclear. The government parties' massive defeat in the local elections has done nothing to convince them that they should bring forward their extinction by announcing the early general election that the PDS, the MSI and the Northern League have been demanding—and many Italians fear that those who benefited most from the years of corruption will do anything, including planting bombs, to get the election postponed. The markets, however, seem to have got used to the idea that the PDS might form the core of a new government. On Monday, the lira rose nearly 1 per cent against the Deutschmark.

David Henderson

50 YEARS AGO

11 December 1943
"The new power politics"

The New Statesman attempts to explain the power of the Soviet Union

There are many reasons for Russian strength and allied weakness, but the first lesson which we all of us know in our hearts, however reluctant we may be to admit it, is that socialism is the only efficient way of running a community. The progress of Russia has disproved every criticism made against socialism as a matter of economic theory. So far from the socialist state being extravagant and incapable of saving, the truth is that no country in history has ever approached the Soviet record for thrift and saving. The consuming power of the country has been cut down to the bare minimum to equip the country as a whole with capital assets. We may argue that too much has been sacrificed; we may complain that considerations of political liberty and individual rights have been swept aside in the ruthless pursuit of national efficiency. We should all agree that it has been a world tragedy that, owing to the external threat from the capitalist powers, the social purpose of the first socialist state has been so unhappily diverted to preparation for war . . . But [the Soviet Union] has accomplished that economic and social revolution that every industrial nation must, by some road or another, carry through if it is to be efficient.

Bosnian elite on the brink

Unlike the Serb and Croat leaderships, the Muslim-led government of Bosnia-Hercegovina still can't decide what it wants: either the whole republic restored, or a Muslim statelet inside the "union of republics" proposed by the David Owen-Thorvald Stoltenberg "peace plan".

Its "yes-but-no" stance in Geneva is a tactic to buy time to wrest land from Croat forces in central Bosnia and to beseech (in vain) more American support. But it also reflects divisions in the ruling party in Sarajevo—the Democratic Action Party, led by President Alija Izetbegovic. Even if the Serbs handed back substantial tracts of eastern Bosnia and guaranteed access to the Adriatic coast, this internal division would compel the government side to find other reasons not to sign.

The key instance of confusion was the two-day Bosnjacki Sabor (Bosnian Assembly) of 350 Muslim intellectuals, politicians, clerics and army leaders, convened in Sarajevo at the end of September. The Sabor, organised by an elite grouping that is seen as the policy think-tank of the governing party, was expected to back the option of a Muslim statelet under cover of the Owen-Stoltenberg plan. Instead, it accepted the abysmal plan under conditions that actually reject it. The Bosnia-Hercegovina parliament followed suit, and the negotiating posture has not changed since.

The Sabor did, though, vote unreservedly to

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revive the old Ottoman word *Bosnjak* as a name for Bosnian Muslims. Coming after 18 months of genocidal onslaught, this might look trivial; in Balkan terms, it was an important signal of intent, marking a shift in national ideology. The Sabor was voting to forge a new Bosnian identity that effectively excludes non-Muslims.

One can see the appeal. The old name overrides the awkward national-religious compound of "Bosnian Muslim", exploited so easily by local enemies and their western appeasers. The common denominator, "Bosnian", can seem hopelessly polluted by Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat crimes. The minister of culture, who helped to organise the Sabor, talks warmly of the old name as a means of reversing the 19th-century process of national segregation.

But this is absurd. No alternative name exists around which to preserve and rebuild a secular and viable state. Worse, the pro-*Bosnjak* vote shows the Muslim urban elite borrowing a model of intellectual vanguardism that does such harm in Belgrade and Zagreb. In this model, well-placed intellectuals are prompted (and rewarded) by the reigning powers to draft blueprints for national identity, blueprints that are later implemented by, as the phrase goes, all necessary means.

It isn't only that Bosnia's pluralism is at stake, or that a beleaguered Muslim statelet would be as nasty as the Serb and Croat versions. It is a question of how to reach the least-worst future, by surviving militarily while working patiently to show Europe and the US that their interests are not served by the Owen-Stoltenberg plan, which, like its Vance-Owen predecessor, cannot work. The diplomacy that produced both plans pins everything on the truism that radical Croat and Serb demands are compatible on paper. Not only is this premise savage towards the Bosnian Muslims, it also (wrongly) writes them off as a military factor. More foolishly still, the negotiations based on it have proceeded as if Serb and Croat radicals are capable of producing a settlement, which they are not.

There is no alternative to national interdependence, no future without economic integration. The government should abandon ambiguity, and tell its people and its soldiers clearly what they are suffering and fighting for. And it should bring the same clarity into its own work. It was a mistake to quietly break the national key in October by appointing a Muslim, Haris Silajdzic, as prime minister. And it was a mistake even to discuss dividing Sarajevo, as they did last week in Geneva.

Time may be on the side of the radical Serbs; it is certainly not on the radical Croats' side—they are losing support inside Croatia as surely as they lose ground in Bosnia. The Sarajevan government needs to resist the urge to cut and run with a gobbet of territory, even a large one. In short, it must keep doors open to the least-worst future, no matter that the Owens and Stoltenbergs join the local barbarians in trying to close them. The Sarajevo government must be wiser than its enemies.

Mark Thompson

LETTER FROM TUNIS

The bedouin shimmered out of the glare of a Saharan noon. They were wearing grey robes and white headdresses, but there was something incongruous about them. They were slung with camcorders and Nikons. And though they were dressed for riding camels, the ship of the desert to which they made their way was an air-conditioned coach. The "bedouin" were, in fact, European tourists, and the coach ferried them from a hotel to a pack of dromedaries at the edge of the dunes, a journey of perhaps 100 yards.

Such a parody of North African culture would be difficult to imagine in Algeria or Libya, Tunisia's neighbours. But Tunisia's president, Zine el-Abdine Ben Ali, is happier accommodating tourists than the Islamic fundamentalism he sees to the west and the demagoguery to the east. Small wonder: earnings from overseas visitors cover between 50 and 100 per cent of the trade deficit, and provide work for at least 200,000 people in a population of eight million.

That is not to say that Islamic activism is foreign to Ben Ali's republic. Last year, 265 supporters of the An-Nahda (Renaissance) Party were imprisoned, following trials criticised by Amnesty International, for attempting to overthrow the regime.

An-Nahda is widely seen by observers as the most progressive Islamic movement in the region, with its pro-democracy stance. But that hasn't stopped the government dismissing its advocacy of pluralism as a sham.

News bulletins are often little more than the presidential diary adapted for radio

The movement has suffered setbacks with the jail terms and the exile of leading figures including Rachid Al-Ghannouchi, who has been granted political asylum in Britain—it certainly doesn't appear to be as formidable now as Algeria's Islamic underground, which has been linked to the kidnapping and murder of foreigners in recent months.

But Ben Ali is taking no chances: noting how Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front almost seized power in elections last year, the Tunisian leader has ruled that there will be no place on the hustings for An-Nahda at presidential and legislative polls due in March.

At the same time, he has made sure that the franchise curries favour with the international business community, pledging that opposition parties will be able to hold parliamentary seats for the first time. Publicity for this serves to inter memories of the president's 1989 election victory, when he emerged with a suspiciously handsome 99 per cent of the vote and his Constitutional Democratic Assemby Party took all 141 seats in the legislature. It also distracts from allegations that oppression, imprisonment and torture continue to flourish in the penumbra of Tunisian politics. Nothing, however, can disguise the fact that Ben Ali likes to keep his authority in front of his citizens: news bulletins are often little more than the presidential diary adapted for radio, and his likeness adorns every public building.

While wooing the foreign exchange that he believes stands between liberal Tunisia and fundamentalism, the president has been the sometimes uncomfortable host of the PLO. After being run out of Beirut in 1982, Yasser Arafat *et al* decamped to Tunis, where they were welcomed by Ben Ali's predecessor, Habib Bourguiba.

But Tunisia found that having the PLO in its backyard posed problems. Two PLO leaders were assassinated in the capital, and Israeli aircraft bombed the organisation's headquarters. On top of Ben Ali's support for Saddam Hussein in the Gulf war, his role as Yasser Arafat's landlord did him few favours with the west until the dramatic *entente* between Israel and the PLO came along.

Now, though, Tunisia is benefiting from its hospitality. The positive side of entertaining the PLO was always the heightened respect of large parts of the Arab world: money in the bank against the threats both of speculative trespassing by Libya and of fundamentalism. Today, the PLO's respectability in the wider world has put a flattered Tunis on the CNN map, at the centre of international events.

Despite the glamour of its association with an emerging Palestinian homeland, Tunisia's most important relationship is the more prosaic one it has cultivated with the European Community. More specifically, the smallest north African nation is finding that growth depends on links with its former colonial power, France. Relations with Paris have been improving since the end of the Algerian war in the sixties. Now France is at the centre of an arc of states, including Belgium, Germany and Italy, with whom Tunisians do the bulk of their business. Most invisible earnings, provided by migrant workers and tourism, also come from western Europe. French language and culture remain pervasive, boosted by the arrival of satellite broadcasts from the French TV network, Antenne 2.

Tunisia does show some signs of wanting to shore up its indigenous way of life. Not far from the sands where coach parties mimic Lawrence of Arabia is a raggle-taggle collection of single-storey dwellings. This community, which ekes a living from the hot tundra bordering the Sahara, is one of many being offered all manner of incentives from the state to stay put: schools, doctors, metalled roads, regular buses. But this sop to Islamic radicals by no means represents a rejection of westernisation. On the contrary, the desert hamlet will soon be a rare island in the roaring main of tourist traffic.

Stephen Smith

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Knowles-Brown

Once they were a source of mirth, but now people are taking them seriously. **Kirsty Milne** travels north of the border to investigate the rise of British llama farming

Look out for the llamas

The llamas eye me, chewing. They hum among themselves. Modestly, questioningly, like elderly ladies choosing cakes in an Edinburgh teashop.

The situation is perplexing enough even without the humming. The last time I saw a llama it was where a llama should be, grazing peacefully on a plateau in Peru. Not prancing about on the Scottish Borders, batting its enormous eyelashes at every passing sheep.

But here in the Lowther hills, where Inter-City trains streak the last lap of the London-Edinburgh line, 30 head of llama survey the scene—for all the world as if inspecting the snow-filled passes of their native Andes.

They move to the gate in a cluster, their Loch Ness monster necks snaking forward to get a better look at me. Back go banana-shaped ears. Long-forgotten llama lore suggests it may be politic to stand back.

"Do they spit?" I ask doubtfully, watching the congregation of flared nostrils in the goat-mix bowl.

Ann Knowles-Brown is torn between her regard for truth and her instinct for llama promotion. "They *do* spit," she concedes. "They spit at one another. But in ten years, they've never spat at us."

She and her husband Peter are in the grip of a grand passion. If you can't actually see the llamas roaming round their 1,000-acre hill sheep farm, you can look at ornamental substitutes in the living room. "They're fantastic animals," enthuses Peter, who wears a sweatshirt with a llama logo and the legend "Lowther llamas" on it.

Peter was a Hampstead jeweller before he discovered llamas. He lists the attributes of the beast. "Intelligent, cuddly—you can take them into the local pub if you feel like it. Incredibly hardy—people say that black-faced sheep are hardy, but llamas are hardier. And they produce this marvellous quality fleece: warm and soft as cashmere."

It's nice to see llamas being taken seriously. Too often they have been a source of mirth or the subject of light verse. Consider Michael Jackson's llama, no doubt now lonely and neglected. Or the slanderous Monty Python sketch in which people shriek warninngs against "very dangerous" amphibious llamas, supposedly a danger to casual swimmers. Or Hilaire Belloc's frankly dismissive caricature: "The llama is a woolly sort of fleecy hairy goat/With an indolent expression and an undulating throat/Like an unsuccessful literary man."

The Knowles-Browns will have none of this. They treat the llama with proper respect, pointing to its noble heritage as the mainstay of the Inca empire. When the *conquistadores* arrived from Spain and tried to penetrate the Incas' mountain strongholds, their horses fell dead from altitude sickness. But the resident llamas went scampering up sheer rocks bearing loads of up to 100lb, nature having equipped them with extra red corpuscles to combat the oxygen shortage.

Peter and Ann Knowles-Brown have never been to South America. When they first encountered llamas, ten years ago, it was in an article in *Farmers Weekly*. "We phoned up every zoo, every wildlife park, every dealer," says Peter. "We made an absolute nuisance of ourselves. Everyone said, There aren't any, you can't get one. Go away."

Rescue came in the form of Lady Arran, who sold them their first female for £200. "She'd decided to move into muntjak deer and wallabies," explains Peter. "She said they kept the grass shorter."

The Knowles-Browns bought their first male from Burford Wildlife Park. "Within minutes, people were phoning us up saying, 'I gather you're the experts on llama farming.' Everyone was talking about diversification at the time, so there was a lot of interest. But no one in this country knew the first thing about llamas."

Llamas are, however, big business in the US, especially in California. "There," says Peter Knowles-Brown, "you get people jogging with llamas, meditating with llamas. It's quite a cult." But strict quarantine regulations, designed to stop diseases like TB and blue tongue, make it difficult to import llamas from South America. Instead, llama-crazed Americans descended on Britain in the early 1980s, bumping up the price to as much as £5,000 for a female. "Zoos and wildlife parks sold like mad, with the result that the UK lost a lot of good stock," says Peter Knowles-Brown.

He keeps track of llama numbers (estimated at 2,000 in the UK) through the British Camelid Association. Formed in a motorway cafe on the M6, it covers the three Hispanic cousins of the camel: llamas; alpacas (smaller and shaggier); and guanacos (smaller still and wilder). The association's 200 members share their enthusiasm for the creatures through the quarterly *Camelids Chronicle*, which advertises "llama transport" and "alpacas for sale". A miniature llama motif marks the end of every article.

There are, of course, frivolous llama owners who treat their animals like novelty pets, organising gymkhanas or getting them to caddy on the golf course. Peter and Ann Knowles-Brown are prepared to muck in at shows—where, as Peter says, "We get put with the wild boar and the ostriches." But the Knowles-Browns have a serious commercial purpose in mind. They are convinced that

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Handy Andes: Llamas on Ben Nevis (left); could they compete with sheep?

llama knitwear should be able to compete with cashmere in the luxury market. In their fantasies, home-grown Lowther fibre is clinging to the shoulders of glossy-haired girls in Bond Street.

There is plenty of precedent. The 19th-century Bradford manufacturer Titus Salt made his fortune from popularising alpaca hair. It was so warm and strong that it was used to dress draught-ridden clerics. Gentlemen of quality wore alpaca jackets—as they do today on the streets of Manhattan and Rome.

Knowles-Brown hurries to pre-empt the charge that llama-farming in the UK could hurt South American exporters. "As an association, we feel we have no right to take business away from South America. We hope that we will actually help the South American Indians by creating a market for good-quality camelid fibre in this country."

But it is a long way from the freezing Lowther hills to the shop windows of the metropolis. True, the Lowther llamas' carefully hoarded fibre is beautifully soft and clean. ("Not like the smelly stuff you get from sheep," says Peter Knowles-Brown, whose opinion of sheep has evidently suffered from his acquaintance with llamas.)

The problem is the coarse "guard hairs" in the llama's outer coat. These can be combed out by hand, but for practical purposes you need a "de-hairing" machine, of the sort used to treat cashmere. Most de-hairing plants, however, will not accept fibre in quantities less than tonnes, whereas the British Camelid Association can scrape together no more than 50-100 kilogrammes at a time.

"It's very frustrating for our association," says Peter Knowles-Brown, "We can make our own garments as a cottage industry. But if llamas are to make sense for farmers, we've got to produce fibre on a commercial scale." His hopes are pinned on a Bradford firm, which has agreed to de-hair 50 kilogrammes of llama fibre.

One solution would be to diversify into alpacas. Their fibre needs less de-hairing, and there is more of it. But there are only 300 alpacas in Britain, as opposed to 2,000 llamas. A female alpaca costs £4,000- £5000, compared with a female llama at £2,000-£3,000.

As an experiment, the Knowles-Browns this year bred their first alpaca-llama cross, a fluffy demerara-coloured creature, which can be seen nosing the haughty legs of the snowy-white adults. Another possibility is surrogate motherhood, with llamas carrying alpaca embryos. Scientists at Aberdeen University (which hosts a a special research project on camelid reproduction) are perfecting techniques of transplanting embryos from one species to another—something Peter Knowles-Brown hopes will be achieved "without surgery".

Joyce D'Silva, of Compassion in World Farming, objects to the idea of embryo transfer. She is unhappy with the whole idea of llama farming, however good the conditions under which the animals are kept might seem. "We've seen the same trend with deer farming and ostrich farming. It starts out in a comparatively benign, small-scale fashion. But there's greater profit to be made by intensifying. We're worried that in the future, llamas will be factory-farmed."

The farming community itself has taken a cautious approach to llamas ("Farmers," sighs Peter Knowles-Brown philosophically, "are a very conservative body of people." Local residents have proved more receptive. The Lowther llamas have been introduced to schoolchildren, while Borders police recently took five of them up Ben Nevis to raise money for charity. Ann Knowles-Brown says the llamas themselves make it clear when the limits of their tolerance have been reached. "If they don't want to do something, they just lie down and won't have anything more to do with you."

With some difficulty, given the joyous camelid frisking in front of me, I raise the sensitive issue of eating llamas. Everyone looks grave. "That's a very emotive subject," says Peter Knowles-Brown. "After all, here I am producing lamb. But I keep this herd for fibre, I'm not interested in meat. It's meant to be very good, though. Like Aberdeen Angus."

Uneaten and uninterfered with, a llama will live for 20 years. So the Lowther herd have plenty of time to grow into the landscape—and to alert an astonished world to camelid potential. "I am convinced these animals have a great future ahead of them," says Peter Knowles-Brown, speaking with the absolute faith of a convert.

In the meantime, travellers on the Edinburgh train don't know what they're missing. For the benefit of passengers with hypersensitive ears: if you listen carefully, you might just catch the Lowther llamas humming their way into the next millennium.

INFLUENCES

ROCKY RYAN
"Storyteller, *not* 'hoaxer'"

What books and authors have had the greatest influence on your beliefs?
Why I am not a Christian (and other essays on religion and related subjects) and *Human Knowledge: its scope and limits*, by Bertrand Russell; *Language, Truth and Logic*, by A J Ayer; *The Rights of Man*, by Thomas Paine; *God and the New Physics*, by Paul Davies.

Name one film, one book, one play, one poem, and one song or piece of music that you would most like everyone to see, read or hear.
Film: Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane*.
Book: *Why I am not a Christian*, by Bertrand Russell.
Play: *Hamlet*.
Poem: "If" by Rudyard Kipling.
Song: Anything sung by Luciano Pavarotti, but especially "Nessun Dorma" from Puccini's *Turandot*.

In the early stages of your life, which figures stand out as an important influence on you?
My mother, Charlotte; Billy Graham (for conning people); and the bent copper who fitted me up and had me put away in borstal for three years for *absolutely nothing*.

What event during your lifetime has had the greatest effect on your political beliefs?
The holocaust (the second world war).

Which political figure—living or dead—do you most admire?
Thomas Paine.

If you could visit any time in history for 24 hours, which would you choose?
Ten months BC, to make sure that Jesus Christ was never born—thus sparing mankind untold misery, suffering and ignorance.

What do you consider the greatest threat at present to individual freedom and liberty?
The Conservative government's plans to change the law to prevent and deny a person's right to remain silent when arrested and in police custody.

On important matters, whose opinion—other than your own—do you trust most?
Those of my brother, Bob; my son, Joshua; and Tony Benn MP.

Who is the greatest prime minister we never had?
Tony Benn. Unlike the majority of MPs, he is not afraid of speaking the truth, no matter what the consequences are. He knows what he is talking about, does not need anybody to write speeches for him, and is a real socialist. As prime minister, he would help to get rid of those parasites known as the royal family—and educate the public of their robber baron antecedents. He also would give back to Ireland the remaining six counties that Britain is still occupying.

If you could pass one law, what would it be?
I would ban *all* religious education in schools and replace the fairytales and myths with teaching children the truth about man's origins and place in the universe by making Bertrand Russell *compulsory* reading.

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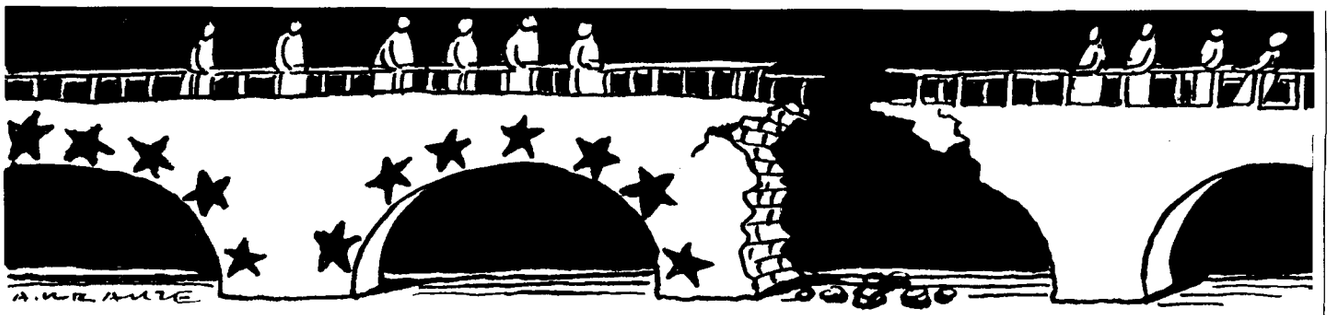

In the midst of fundamentalist terrorism and war between Kurds and the Turkish state, could a vision of a new Europe be found in Turkey? **Steve Platt** reports

Nothing new on the Eastern Front?

Somewhere beneath those mixed-stone citadel walls—Hellenistic plinths piled on Latin lintels, Ottoman brick braced on Galatian foundation stone—I was struck by the significance of it all. Here I was, an English native and a British citizen, taking directions from a German national in a Turkish town about the whereabouts of a French/Turkish family to whom I was to deliver some Kurdish documents. It was how the world should be.

Three years ago, the young boys playing in the Alaeddin mosque by the old Ankara citadel gate had wanted me to take their pictures as they posed in the mosque's 12th-century walnut mimbar. I had had some doubts about the propriety of acceding to such a request—not so much secularist as sacrilegious, it had seemed—but they were local boys and it was their mosque, so I went along with it anyway. This time, I would have been more cautious. Before I arrived there had been a spate of fundamentalist violence in Turkey—the murder of a laic Muslim woman, the assassination of a journalist, the lynching of a "sexual pervert", the mob attack at the hotel in Sivas in which 37 people were killed because a publisher of extracts from Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* was speaking there.

But there were no Turkish boys on this occasion, only a group of American visitors, who wanted their photographs taken beside a marble stone carved with a Byzantine cross, itself half-erasing an earlier, Roman inscription. The citadel wall in which it stood was a rash of disjointed blocks, relics from past structures and civilisations, torn haphazardly from their architectural contexts and reassembled in a garbled parody of their origins.

The heterogeneity of the stones in the Ankara citadel wall stands in contrast to the homogeneity of the Turkish nation—and of the ethos that underpins its sense of nationhood. Here, perhaps more than in any other country in "Europe", the notion of a singular ethnic identity, and exclusion of the "other", has been cast in constitutional stone: to be a citizen of Turkey is to be a Turk. Since the "exchange of populations" that led to the expulsion of Anatolia's Greeks after the War of Independence in the early 1920s (and the 1955 riots that led to the departure of most of Istanbul's remaining 100,000-strong Greek population), the only non-Turk ethnic group of any size has been the Kurds.

And not only have their political and cultural organisations faced proscription and repression; not only has the state attempted to expunge all sense of an independent Kurdish identity; but even the use of the terms "Kurd" and "Kurdish" has been placed beyond the pale of permissible political dialogue.

When the prime minister, Tansu Ciller, who came to office earlier this year at the head of a new coalition government including the Social Democratic Populist (SHP) party, had the temerity to raise the possibility of allowing radio and television broadcasts or courses in the Kurdish language, the state president Suleyman Demirel, fell out furiously with her. There were some questions on which debate was "impermissible", he said; any talk of Kurdish language rights amounted to "outright capitulation to the PKK" (the Kurdish independence movement that has been involved in an escalating military conflict with the Turkish state). In a subsequent statement on "the south-east", Ciller contrived not to use the words "Kurd" or "Kurdish" at all, while a press interview had her insisting that there was "no Kurdish question, only a question of terrorism". "Nothing new on the Eastern Front," as one noted newspaper correspondent commented ironically.

I had come to Ankara (and hence to the walls astride its citadel gate) for the third Helsinki Citizens Assembly. The HCA is a direct descendant of the networks established by those western European peace activists and eastern European dissidents who came together in the 1980s through organisations such as European Nuclear Disarmament, now seeking new means of constructing a "common European home" in a continent wracked by increasing violent conflict. It had come to Ankara, lured by large subsidies from the Social Democrat-controlled municipality, to ask the question: "Where does Europe end?"

Even without those subsidies, Ankara was an apposite choice. Turkey *wants* to be a part of Europe—or at least those among its political, military, commercial and intellectual elites who hold power do. There is an increasing pan-Turkish tendency, which looks towards the large ethnic Turk populations in the former Soviet republics as the focus for future development and trade; and this is in part conflated with a growing Islamist tendency that sees a generalised threat in all things western and a specific threat in Russian/Greek Orthodox encirclement. But the Turkish state and its government still sees entry to "Europe" as its preferred route towards economic and social advancement.

This was demonstrated by the efforts of the HCA's Social Democrat hosts to woo the 500 foreign delegates towards their vision of a future Europe (an inclusive Europe, specifically one that would include Turkey)—and also in their keenness to establish Turkey's democratic credentials in the European mind, particularly in its handling of the Kurdish issue. SHP leader and deputy prime minister Murat Karayalcin used the conference opening session to speak at length on the subject. Partly, this was aimed at a domestic audience, as he strived to convince an increasingly anxious Turkish people (and edgy Turkish military) that the SHP was not "soft" on Kurdish terrorism. But he was also speaking to a European audience—or more precisely a European Union audience—to try to convince them that the war on Kurdish terrorism was not a war on the Kurdish people. "We will solve the problem of terrorism . . . by keeping democracy, human rights and love of people at the forefront," he said, thanking the French and German governments for their recent bans on PKK organisations in those countries.

The next day, the best-attended workshop of the conference was a Turkish-Kurdish dialogue. Over 200 people came from Turkey alone, where the national HCA has made great efforts to create a democratic space in which such discussions can occur. That this workshop could take place at all was achievement enough in a country where proscriptions, arrests, disappearances, torture, beatings and killings are a commonplace in the bigotry and violence that surrounds all mention of the Kurdish issue. That it could take place with such high-level support is a small, positive sign in an otherwise grim context.

Two years ago, after the killing by troops of up to 20 mourners at the funeral of a Kurdish politician in Diyarbakir (himself kidnapped

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and murdered by unknown assailants), the Turkish HCA issued a statement urging both the PKK and the armed forces to pull back from the spiral of violence "[that] first sows and then reaps its own bitter harvest, making implacable enemies of communities that otherwise would have no reason not to get along. The bodies of those that have died in vain on all sides pile up in a wall of separation that makes continued coexistence impossible." Even the head of the hardline BBP "Great Unity" party, Muhsin Yazicioglu, has warned of the danger that: "Instead of a conflict between the state and the PKK, we could end up with a Turkish-Kurdish conflict."

There is serious talk today of ethnic cleansing in cities such as Izmir (formerly Smyrna, many of whose former Greek inhabitants were, literally, driven into the sea in a bout of "cleansing" 70 years ago). Yet still the PKK persists in its war with the Turkish state, and still the Turkish state responds with the myth of a military solution. "From now on there will be absolutely no mercy for them and their accomplices," said Osman Pamukoglu, one of the generals in charge of the anti-PKK offensive, recently. His soldiers would not even bury the Kurdish dead. "It is not for corpse collection and disposal that mothers have entrusted their sons to me. My job is not to collect carrion but to exterminate."

These are all-too-familiar sentiments in parts of Europe today. If there is a single unifying thread linking all those various HCA activists who assembled in Turkey this week, though, it is a belief in the potential for *citizens*, linked across ethnic and national boundaries, to transcend old and new enmities, first through dialogue to negotiate a new "social contract" by which different peoples can live together, and second through international action.

The HCA is among those various individuals and groups pioneering if not an entirely new politics, then at least a politics that is not hidebound by intractable ideologies—whether they be strung in the straitjackets of the old cold war, or located in the newly resurgent national and religious fundamentalisms that have been freed in communism's wake. Talk does *not* come cheap; indeed often it does not come at all. So every dialogue, every democratic space in which it can occur, is invaluable.

So, too, is every initiative and idea that crosses those "walls of separation". From the little, local efforts to bring aid or understanding to the mobilisation of the whole international community in defence of communities under attack, hope for the future cries out for the sort of pluralist, non-exclusivist forms of social organisation that groups like the HCA counterpose against the narrow nationalist or fundamentalist orthodoxies.

That is why the question: "Where does Europe end?" is not an academic one. It must not be permitted to end, as one delegate in Ankara said, "on the hills above Sarajevo"; nor at those new walls halting migration at the European Union borders; nor at the different walls of the closed mind and the exclusivist nation. If the Europe of the future is to have walls at all, let them be like those of the Ankara citadel, made up from many different cultures, many different "others"—and none the less solid for all of that.

We have power they cannot guess at. We can build—and rebuild—bridges across Europe, says **Christopher Hitchens**

The *Washington Post*, on 30 August, carried the melancholy headline, "As Mostar Bridge Crumbles, So Does Bosnian Dream of Ethnic Unity". The title surmounted a story about the slow destruction of the Stari Most; that 16th-century triumph of Ottoman architecture that is imperilled because it obstructs the growth of a "Greater Croatia"—the twin of "Greater Serbia" in the modern-day Molotov-Ribbentrop pact that has been indulged by the forces of old and new Europe.

The reporter, John Pomfret, told the story of a certain Jadranko Fink, who as a Croat and a Catholic had served and died in the armed forces of the Republic of Bosnia-Hercegovina. On his grave in the Muslim quarter, there appears, by his own request, only a picture of the bridge. "I'm fighting for the bridge," he had told foreign visitors before he was killed, "so I can jump off it with my buddies again in peace. It's my world, the Old Bridge and Mostar. If the bridge falls, Mostar falls with it. It's our heart." Diving from the bridge was one of the great unifying sports among Mostar's four populations—the Catholics, the Muslim, the Orthodox and the too-seldom stressed secular. By all accounts, the most accomplished diver was Emile Baljic, a local theatre manager. When last seen he was (at the age of 60) a member of a press-gang "recruited" by the "Croat Defence Council" and forced to dig trenches in an exposed area of the front line.

As matters deteriorated in this way, Pomfret was compelled to report, there were those among the defenders of the bridge who had ceased to view it as a symbol of transcendence or internationalism. "This bridge shows the beauty of our Muslim culture," said a local Muslim commander. "The Croats don't have anything here that can compare." Thus the logic of cleansing and apartheid reaches out to infect even the mentality of its victims.

Pomfret gave no sign, in his excellent dispatch, of having read Ivo Andric's Bosnian masterpiece, *The Bridge on the Drina*. Those who have read this book will need no reminding of the emblematic importance of bridges in Balkan history, and of the *kapia*: the meeting-point in the centre of the span that became common ground for all the citizens of the town of Visegrad. (Visegrad is now known to the wider world, if it is known at all, as the site of an early "cleansing" operation in the recent outbreak of barbarism.) Recall how Andric, a Bosnian Serb, evokes a moment when the town, and the bridge, is menaced by a terrifying flood: "Turks, Christians and Jews are mingled together. The force of the elements brought all these men together and bridged, at least for one evening, the gulf that divided one faith from another." Gradually, and in an age when secularism was not an option, the bridge helps to emulsify entrenched differences. It ceased, to the Serbs, to be a symbol of conquest. It ceased, to the Muslims, to be a symbol of superiority.

One should be on one's guard against architectural metaphors. Some are sentimental as well as inexact (recall the great "roof" of Gorbachev's purported Europe); and some are sinister (one is wise to recoil from anyone who is too much given to speaking of the national "hearth"). But bridges are known for their dialectical and cooperative character—there is no such thing as a one-way or a one-sided bridge—and can be judged by their enemies as well as their admirers. I remember Ian Paisley, the political leader of Protestant fundamentalism in Northern Ireland, being invited to take the role of "bridge-builder" by an interviewer. "Bridges!" he sneered in reply. "Bridges are like traitors. They go over to the other side."

At an early meeting of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly, in Prague in the closing days of Brezhnevism, it was to the bridges over the river that young Czechs and Slovaks would repair in the evening. On the bridge one could be free of surveillance. We spoke then, rather idealistically, of forming a "bridge " between the human rights movements of the Warsaw Pact and the disarmament and human rights movements of Nato. Despite a good deal of battering and erosion, some of the spans of that bridge survive until now.

Turkey, where this year's HCA took place, is often lazily spoken of in journalistic accounts as a bridge between "east and west" Europe and Asia, Islam and Christianity, the modern and pre-modern worlds. The bridges at Galata and Bosphorus have been the fount of cliché in this respect. Yet clearly the Turkish perspective will be essential to any serious architect in the bridge business.

It may seem repellent to many Turks that the same "Europe" which has condemned Bosnia to partition and desecration should dare to judge Turkey's fitness for family membership. But there is another Europe, filiated by many small bridges, which cares about Bosnia for the same reason that it cares about Salman Rushdie and the Kurds, and about the dismemberment of Cyprus. Those who defend Turkish families in Germany are often the sternest critics of the Turkish state. This only appears to be a contradiction in the mind of the one-sided. And, as I have said there is no such thing as a one-sided bridge.

The late E P Thompson once summoned us to think and act as if a free, undivided Europe already existed. It was both an inspiring and and an utterly practical injunction, because it prefigured an imminent reality. We have to find the same nerve and imagination. Let the vandals and the Yahoos and the fascists burn the books and blow up the bridges. It is their nature. But we have knowledge and power they cannot guess at. We can read the books, and disseminate them. We have the plans of the bridges, and we can rebuild them. In the meantime as the books burn and the bridges fall, we can act as if we were readers and writers—and architects too.

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The European Union is in a state of flux. The new right threatens its federalist future and the attitudes of the left remain deeply equivocal and ambiguous. But in spite of everything, says **John Palmer**, the Union remains our only model for a viable world federation

Après nous, le monde!

Anyone hoping that this week's Brussels summit will light a clear political beacon illuminating the way ahead for the renamed European Union is in for a disappointment. With few exceptions, the EU heads of government are in no position to offer leadership to anyone. They are deeply politically unpopular at home, and they lack both the political authority and the collective vision to give a decisive lead on any of the key challenges facing the Union.

The agenda for the latest EU summit will be much the same as for the past three such occasions: how to respond to the recession and the tidal-wave of mass unemployment (now approaching 20 million) in the Union, and how to respond to the continuing war in Bosnia. On neither subject are the heads of European governments going to say or do much of consequence.

The President of the Commission, Jacques Delors, is fighting a desperate rearguard action to get the 12 EU member states to recognise the need for radical new measures to create jobs. He believes that this must include sweeping new European Union-wide investment-led recovery measures focusing on the environment and social needs as well as measures to improve European industry's global competitiveness.

The Commission is sceptical about the prospects of economic recovery and believes that it will take a massive effort by the European Union and national governments for there to be any hope of even halving the levels of unemployment by the end of the decade. This is one reason why the Commission still sees merit in encouragement for reduced working hours and for work sharing.

Meanwhile, national governments remain immobilised by the "know nothing, do nothing" dogma that now reigns supreme in their treasuries and finance ministries. There are unmistakable signs of deepening social polarisation in countries throughout western Europe with trade unions finally mobilising to prevent further massive job losses as well as cuts in pay and conditions.

It is also clear that European Union governments have no intention of doing anything serious to halt and reverse the genocidal war of aggression and ethnic cleansing directed against the mainly Muslim peoples of Bosnia by the Serb and Croat regimes. Having refused to defend Bosnia (for example by making it a UN Protectorate or despatching WEU peace-keeping troops in 1991 before the war began) the 12 have also refused the Bosnians the means to defend themselves (through their insistence on maintaining the misnamed arms embargo).

At present the European Union (and the United Nations as a whole) is piling pressure on the Bosnians to accept the *de facto* military conquests of the Belgrade and Zagreb xenophobes. If not, their peace envoy Lord Owen implies, humanitarian aid to Bosnia may be cut off next year. Although Lord Owen's role is openly criticised by some EU governments all are to a degree complicit in the dismemberment of the one multi-ethnic oasis of tolerance in the former Yugoslavia.

The EU prefigures a model based on shared sovereignty to replace the discredited 19th-century system

Meanwhile, conflict over the speed and extent of any further moves to full European economic and political union is beginning to mirror a new left/right split developing across the political spectrum. For the first time since the launching of the European Community in 1957, significant conservative and far-right forces, not only in Britain but throughout Europe, are actively mobilising to resist any new moves to a deeper European union.

Until quite recently, "Europe" was an issue that sundered the traditional right and the traditional left in quite a few countries—notably Britain and Denmark. That may be changing. The new anti-European hard right, now undoubtedly emerging in most EU countries, occupies the space which (in British terms) might be defined as lying between Margaret Thatcher and the BNP/National Front.

In France, this same anti-European Union segment of opinion is defined by figures such as Charles Pasqua, the right-wing interior minister, at one end, and Jean-Marie Le Pen and the Front National at the other. In Germany, it is defined by Chancellor Kohl's erstwhile coalition ally, the leader of the Bavarian CSU, Edmund Stoiber, at one end and by the Republikaner and other neo-fascist groups at the other.

Even in those countries most closely identified with the history and evolution of the European Community—since 1 November the European Union—something similar is happening. The nominally liberal, but in reality very conservative, Dutch VVD, is increasingly affecting a Thatcherite Euroscepticism. The Belgian and Dutch racist far right, meanwhile, openly campaign against the whole idea of a federal European Union.

Of course a large chunk of the centre-right political and business establishment remains "pro-European" in a general sense and a defender of the constitutional status quo up to and including the Maastricht treaty. This is hardly surprising. The Maastricht treaty strengthens the "inter-governmental" character of the European Union at the expense of the Treaty of Rome institutions, which are implicitly federalist in aspiration.

This means that in critical areas of policy—foreign affairs, security (and in future defence) as well as immigration, policing and "interior" issues, there is no meaningful system of democratic accountability. In theory, this vast and still obsessively secretive edifice (so much the inspiration of the British Tory government during the Maastricht negotiations) is accountable to national parliaments.

But as the Dutch national assembly has already found when it tried to inquire too closely into the rapidly developing area of EU police cooperation, this is a myth. Not only do national parliaments have no real control, but neither the European Commission nor the European parliament have any legal standing at all on the deliberations in questions such as immigration and asylum policy —something that civil liberties campaigners now recognise as a serious flaw in the Maastricht treaty.

It is true that the Maastricht treaty does extend to a modest degree the powers of the directly elected European parliament, but these are directed by the treaty toward the Commission (a relatively open and transparent body) rather than to the Council of Ministers—the real power centre. There is also a new Committee of the Regions, which may be very important in the future but which is, for the moment, toothless.

The enthusiasm of the centre right for further European integration—particularly in the area of citizens' rights, democracy, the environment and social policy—is diminishing fast. For the mainstream centre-right parties, the case for further European union, at best, remains to be established.

The centre right—to say nothing of the business community—understands that without perceptible progress to full monetary union and a single currency it will become increasingly difficult to safeguard the single European market from the corroding effects of economic nationalism. But they are divided among themselves about whether such progress can be achieved without much greater sharing of sovereignty and power in the field of economic policy.

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Peter Knock

On balance, the EU social democratic parties—now known collectively for European Parliament purposes as the European Socialist Party—take a more positive stand. A widening of the EU agenda to include a social, environmental and citizens' rights agenda has been embraced as have vague but radical-sounding measures to tackle mass unemployment (including work sharing).

Needless to say all this proved far too much for the poor old British Labour Party. When the ESP European election manifesto was adopted recently at a meeting of party leaders in Brussels, the Labour Party quickly distanced itself from any suggestion of support for active measures to encourage work sharing without loss of social security rights.

Ironically, both the Labour Party and the Tory MEPs—who are now affiliated to the pro-federalist Christian Democrat European Peoples' Party—will be following, at best, semi-detached strategies *vis-à-vis* their partners in the elections next June. The new Liberal Democrat MEPs who expect to be elected will also face an awkward choice given the looming split threatened in the European parliament Liberal Fraction between the new Eurosceptic liberal right and more left-of-centre breakaway groups such as the Dutch Democrats 66.

The social democratic parties do want to see greater powers for the European parliament to achieve equality with the Council of Ministers in shaping EU legislation. But they show little stomach for the fight for democratic control in practice having recently retreated from earlier threats to link institutional reform to European parliamentary approval for the admission to the EU of Austria, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

The signs are that the centre-right Christian Democrats will lose ground badly to the other rightwing and even neo-fascist parties next June. Losses and gains by the social democratic parties of the 12 will probably mean little overall advance.

On the other hand, the independent left and green parties, together with some of the radical regional parties (others, such as the Italian Lega Nord, are by no means on the left), are likely to make net gains. Overall, the European parliament should end up with a clear centre-left/radical-left majority in marked contrast to the continuing right-wing grip of EU governments in the Council of Ministers and the probable shift to the right in the European Commission after Jacques Delors leaves next year.

All of which is stimulating something of a rethink of strategy towards European integration by the green/new left as a whole. The first indications of this came during the second Maastricht referendum in Denmark last June when the left-wing Peoples' Socialist Party switched from "no" to "yes"—helped by the way Norman Tebbit and the far right had hijacked the anti-Maastricht movement. A similar debate has taken place in the Norwegian Left Socialist party which, however, remains formally opposed to Norway's entry into the EU.

Within the EU's green parties, Maastricht is still bitterly criticised for its anti-democratic, inter-governmentalist features. But the critics include a growing number of greens who now openly advocate a decentralised, democratic federal European Union. The Dutch Green Left party, for instance, has already begun a discussion about a written constitution for the Union to be adopted when the Maastricht treaty comes up for review in 1996—something also advocated by individual British Labour MEPs such as David Martin.

It now looks as though the planned enlargement of the EU to include the four EFTA newcomers may be delayed, and they may not join until January 1996. As a result, there may be pressure for the agreed 1996 review of the Maastricht treaty to be brought forward and the whole debate on the character of the Union could start again.

Indeed, the debate cannot be deferred long because of the growing queue of countries in central and eastern Europe which aspire to join the EU. It is conceivable that a 12- or 16-nation union could stagger on a little longer with its present hideously opaque and unaccountable inter-governmentalist constitution. A union of 20 or more nations will have to federalise or bust.

With the right split between genuine "unionists" and those—spearheaded by the neo-Thatcherite coalition—who want to turn the clock back to greater national state control and more inter-governmentalism, the position of the left remains ambiguous. But none of the economic, social, environmental, peacemaking or other objectives of the left can be realised without further steps to a full democratic economic and political union.

For a start, this will involve a written constitution and the demand that future changes in EU institutions should be decided by a special constituent assembly of European and national parliamentarian, rather than just national governments. Second, the new constitution should give to the European parliament the power to elect (and remove) both the president of the Commission and her/his colleagues who would have to put their five-year programme before MEPs for approval.

The European Parliament should have the determining voice in legislation at the Union

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level and at least be given equality with the Council of Ministers in the short term. In such a system, there would be room for the evolution of a second, revising chamber of the European parliament, consisting of national and regional elected governments.

In such a federal system of decentralised democratic control, decisions could be taken—as the doctrine of subsidiarity would have it—"as close to the citizen as possible". For the UK, however, this will present a real crisis, for it would imply the creation not only of Scottish and Welsh institutions of self-government, but of elected regional authorities in England.

Inevitably, given the internationalisation of capitalism, many of the key economic policy decisions affecting jobs, ecologically and socially sustainable investment and growth, and other issues, would have to be taken at the European Union level. But many other decisions—particularly what may become a growing "non-market" sector of employment and the economy—should be taken at the national and especially the regional level.

If the EU is to be able to respond to the wars of national/ethnic aggression—as in Bosnia—that now threaten, it will have to develop its own security and defence capacity. As in Spain in 1936, so today in Bosnia: the real face of imperialism is not military intervention but a hypocritical two-faced non-intervention.

A European defence and security union should be built up as part and parcel of a reformed and strengthened United Nations and CSCE. The remarkable economic, political and military decline of imperialist hegemonies throughout the world does not make it a safer place. In some ways, the world will become more dangerous and more vulnerable as ancient nationalisms—which were subsumed by the cold war superpowers—reassert their demands for self-determination.

Anyone who thinks this may be an unduly ambitious agenda for the left would do well to reflect on the fact that the European debate is going to be increasingly reproduced at a world level. The value of the EU is in large measure that it does prefigure (albeit in an uncertain and inconsistent way) a model based on the sharing of sovereignty and power within a system of multiple democratic accountability.

Such a model is urgently needed to replace the discredited 19th-century system of governmental cooperation and the positively dangerous notion of the international "balance of power".

The era of democratic management of global interdependence is almost upon us. This is made even clearer by the harsh realities of the post-Uruguay Gatt world trade order, by the global technological revolution in financial and communications markets, and by the transfrontier impact of environmental degradation. The campaign for a democratic, federal, European Union—progressively embracing eastern as well as western Europe—should be used by the left to prefigure its struggle tomorrow for a democratic world federation.

John Palmer is European editor of the Guardian

Long before "back to basics", Tony Blair was attempting to reclaim morality for the Labour Party. **Sarah Baxter** meets the man many feel is John Smith's heir apparent

Winning Labour a moral majority

A return to what we are really about, what we believe in, would be a healthy journey for our country as well as the Labour Party . . . There is right and wrong. There is good and bad. We all know this, of course, but it has become fashionable to be uncomfortable about such language.

Tony Blair wrote these words in the foreword to *Reclaiming the Ground*, a slim volume of essays on Christianity and socialism published last year. Long before John Major dreamed up the slogan, "back to basics", Blair had embarked on his own search for the values that underpin society. It has been a delicate journey for him, fraught with hazards and rewards.

Blair is no longer regarded as the enthusiastic young pretender of the Kinnock era, who bounced his way on to Labour's front bench and Britain's television studios in the 1980s. He is now by far and away the man most likely to be the next leader of the Labour Party, although that prize is by no means guaranteed.

He began to raise his game a few years ago by attempting to reposition Labour after it had been caught in a pincer between the Tories' enduring electoral success and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Labour movement is quick to sneer, and he got his fair share of mockery for setting himself up as the party's philosopher king. All the same, his critics began to treat him rather more seriously from then on.

His timing has been impeccable. He was talking about moral issues and his concern for the place of the individual in the community before he was made shadow home secretary. Although the Tories claim to be setting the agenda on crime and the family, Blair has kept one step ahead of them. In the aftermath of the Jamie Bulger case, with divorce laws and child maintenance under scrutiny and the welfare state under attack, the public is beginning to expect more from politicians than just the usual knockabout stuff.

Blair believes there is an ideological vacuum, post-Thatcher, that the Tories have been unable to fill. He is not surprised that there is a whiff of moral panic in the air, because people are feeling genuinely uncertain about the principles they want to govern their lives. He believes it would be a great mistake for the left to dismiss people's anxieties as a passing phenomenon stirred up by the tabloids.

By calling for "back to basics", the Tories have stumbled into natural Labour territory, he says. "We've been hesitant about arguing our case because we've been reluctant to be drawn into what seems to be a narrow argument about morality." It is more than that, he insists. "It is about respect for other people, fairness, social justice and equality of opportunity. These are good values for Labour to put across."

Blair was in short-trousers in the 1960s, and now considers the legacy of that era mixed. He says it is daft, absurd even (two of his favourite words in this debate) to blame the sixties for everything. He is all in favour of the permissive society. "No one would want to go back to the days when, if you were gay, you repressed it, and women stayed in the home. The left was very important in opening up all these areas of debate."

But he points to an interesting contradiction that arose at the same time between the left's theory and practice. People on the left have always been motivated by a passion for improving the lives of individuals. Somewhere along the line, that got confused with both

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social libertarianism and Marxist economics—the idea that rules do not matter and that people cannot be held responsible for their actions. "For many people, Marxist economics became a way of saying 'I'm avoiding making a judgment about society.'"

There are advantages, says Blair, to believing in a market economy. "The clearer you are about that, the easier it is to say that there are certain things it cannot achieve." As he sees it, at the beginning of the century, there was "a great movement" to enhance people's opportunities by means of collective power: free education, municipal housing, public health care, the first principles of national insurance and so on. But, in time, this led to the creation of a large public sector, with built-in bureaucracies and vested interests, which the taxpayer funded and came to resent. "Inevitably, there was going to be a reaction in the name of the individual, and that's what Thatcherism was.

"The basic principle that lay behind these great collective institutions was the notion of cooperation between people." He still wants that ethic to apply today, but he has redefined it to fit his belief in a partnership between the individual and the community. He would like to see greater decentralisation, and more of a mix between the public, the private and the voluntary sector.

It is a very sensitive terrain for a Labour politician. Most members of the shadow cabinet are keeping their heads down. The problem is this. To say nothing is to cede the whole debate about crime, family breakdown and other social issues to the Tories. To say anything more than "Hands off the welfare state" risks giving Tory right-wingers the go-ahead to dismantle it. Peter Lilley and Michael Portillo have already plundered the arguments of Labour politicians to justify their own long-term review of social security spending.

Blair is more careful than most, and they only rarely fling his words back in Labour's face. He is convinced that he is advocating something very different to the Tories. "The idea is not to provide a safety net welfare state, which only comes into operation when people are destitute, but to lift people out of poverty by offering equality of opportunity. The right wants to set up a situation in which you disintegrate society, leaving the majority resenting every single penny that they pay in tax to recipients of state handouts."

An old tune, but one that he thinks is worth repeating, is that, "The more that a young person grows up with a stake in society, with the chance of getting a job and some prosperity, the more likely they are to be a responsible member of society."

He is not interested in what he calls the "political correctness of the right", manifested in ideas about providing hostels for single mothers or "rewarding" stable families with a higher place in the queue for a council house (although David Blunkett has ventured, sometimes clumsily, into this territory). He really is talking about going back to basics: about education and parenting.

It is absolutely fundamental to him that notions of right and wrong and respect for others are learned as children. He is convinced they have to be taught: they are not innate values. "If you don't provide children with rules, somebody else will. It is ridiculous to suppose that people grow up in a vacuum."

Christianity has provided Blair with his own moral framework. Although he attended a chorister's school, he did not have a particularly religious upbringing (he describes his father as more atheist than agnostic). His Christian beliefs were formed at university, at the same time as his commitment to socialism. He is understandably wary about entangling his religious and political views, since the Labour Party dislikes piety and the God-squad tendency. He almost backed off writing the foreword to *Reclaiming the Ground* lest people confuse him with the kind of sanctimonious American politician who is never seen without a Bible and claims God is on his side.

"The values that underpin Christianity are good values and people can respond to them whether they believe or not," he insists. He does not want to over-emphasise the importance of religion to his views. But he and his wife go to church regularly and take their children with them. He is not leaving their moral education to chance.

"The values that underpin Christianity are good values, and people can respond to them whether they believe or not," he insists

One of the surprises of *Reclaiming the Ground* was just how many front-bench Labour politicians turned out to be practising Christians: John Smith, Paul Boateng, Hilary Armstrong and Chris Smith were also among the contributors. Christian socialism has long antecedents in the Labour movement, but it was easier for people to keep their beliefs private in the days when the party had a stronger secular sense of its core values.

Tony Blair is trying to define Labour's place in the material, not the spiritual world, although it is clear that, for him, the one informs the other. He has already run into trouble as a "moderniser" with ideas about changing both the Labour Party's organisation and culture. He lost votes in the elections to the national executive in the fall-out over one member, one vote, and his place is at risk a year from now. His tough line on crime and individual responsibility could easily have been an extra handicap to his advancement.

In fact, it has done him the power of good. The trade unions say that a strong moral message goes down well with their members. He is the only Labour MP who is fully trusted to challenge the Tories on their traditional home territory. After the word "moderniser" was so besmirched at the Labour Party conference, it is the reason he remains Smith's heir apparent.

The Fellow Raising Taxes

(with apologies to the Yellow Rose of Texas by Mitch Miller—well, to his fans, anyway!)

There's a Fellow Raising Taxes
Who turns up on TV—
He doesn't pull his paunches
As far as I can see:
He's wrung my purse so firmly
It's like to broke my bank:
I wish he were a tortoise
And I was a Sherman tank.

(Chorus): They say his mates are bruisers
Who tax us all like toughs,
Though his eyes are vaguely twinkling
Like last year's Sugar Puffs—
He may call us all job-seekers
With in-cap-ac-it-ies,
But the Fellow Raising Taxes
Has the country on its knees.

Now he's standing on the threshold
(And the people underneath),
While smiling at them slyly
As he kicks them in the teeth;
These bodies he dismembers
Were once the Welfare State—
But their parts'll soon be sold off
At a going, going rate.

(Chorus; change key up to A Flat Major)

Oh one day his next door neighbour
May find it's time to shift
And the Fellow Raising Taxes
Will feel his large heart lift:
He'll play the fiddles gaily
As he slips around the back
Till the Fellow Raising Taxes
Finds he's also got the sack . . .

(Chorus and steady drumming . . .)

Bill Greenwell

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Social security: for all our wealth and power, other societies have a lot to teach us

We're used to seeing third-world peoples as recipients of our charity. But, after a recent experience in India, **Jeremy Seabrook** finds they may have a lot to give us

Family values

The first time I met Jagat, I thought he was a hustler. I had been talking to a group of shoeshine boys in Connaught Place, in the centre of Delhi. They had all come from Agra, and were earning a living in the tourist area of the capital. Jagat stood apart, watching. As I walked away, he followed me, and we crossed the road at the same time. He said: "You speak Hindi."

I stopped and we talked for a while. I assumed he would tell me he was my best friend and then ask me for money, which is one of the hazards of talking to strangers in that part of the city. But he didn't ask for anything. Perhaps he just wants to practise his English; perhaps he wants me to find him a job in Europe—there were many possibilities, none of them very charitable thoughts on my part.

He was, he told me, 25. He was in the Border Security Force. None of this was especially endearing. He came from the hills, Nainital; and he had the eyes of a hill-boy, clear brown, with amber skin. He was in the athletics team, and spent his time training for championships. As long as he won most of his races, he would not be required to go on active duty. If he were to lose, he would be off to Kashmir or Punjab. This gives him a powerful incentive to win. He doesn't like fighting.

After an hour or so, he has to return to camp just outside Delhi. Can we meet tomorrow? Why not.

Next evening, I wait for him on the edge of the rotunda. Behind, under the trees, a constant coming and going of the real hustlers —shadows who whisper as they pass you: "Change money?" "Smoke?" "You want girl?" "You sell something?"

Over the next two or three weeks, we met several times, and I learned more about him. His mother, after her marriage, went to live with her husband's family, as is the custom, near Almora in the foothills of the Himalayas. Her husband died when Jagat was two, and his sister five. Their mother was turned out of the house by her husband's brother. She came down from the hills with the two children to look for work in Haldwani, which is the first town of the plains. It is a small, crowded settlement, dominated by the hills, at certain times of the year indigo with their swirls of cloud, at others sharp as metal blades against the clear sky. She found work with a landowner close to the town; fields of maize, soya and rice in the rich soil. She lived in an abandoned shed on the edge of the farm with the two children, and worked as cook for the farm-owners. When her labour was required in the fields, harvesting and preparing the ground for rice and clearing the remains of the wheatfields, she would work, sometimes, 17 or 18 hours a day.

Her daughter helped her, but Jagat, the boy, was privileged. He was allowed to study, while the women waited on him. His task was to provide for them both in due course; the early years of his life were protected. He was their most valuable, indeed, only, resource. His would be the responsibility of looking after his mother.

He was a good runner; and from his early years in school he had won short-distance races. He went to English-medium college, and got a degree in commerce—and then to college where he spent a year specialising in physical training. He joined the Border Security Force as part of the Athletics team, and continued to win medals and cups in all the competitions, both within the BSF and against outside teams. Technically, he is a policeman—rank of constable—a curious anomaly for a man so unaggressive.

He asked me if I would like to meet his family. We travelled the eight hours by bus to Haldwani in the oppressive August heat. Rainstorms had flooded the road and forced the bus to take diversions. Jagat's mother had saved some money over the years; enough to buy five *bighas* of land—a little less than an acre. She bought the land from her employer; enough ground to be self-sufficient in rice and wheat, with a little over to sell in the market. Here, she had begun to build a house for her son, for when he would marry and bring home his wife. It is a concrete cube with verandah and three rooms, simply furnished, with a flat roof where she stores fuelwood for the winter.

Her life remains hard; she is up at 5am to milk the buffaloes and prepare the meal. Her employer allows her to take vegetables from the fields; and she grows pumpkins, chillies and herbs in the immediate vicinity of the house. Her daughter is at home. She married, and went to stay with her husband's family.

Select

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He was a drinker, and unkind to her. She had no choice but to return home; a sad, self-effacing woman, now 31. She, too, is her brother's responsibility.

While I was there, she was taken ill; she had been suffering from stomach pains, had been given drugs and tonics, placebos. It turned out she had a burst appendix. She needed an immediate operation. There was no public hospital doctor in Haldwani who could do it. They needed cash urgently. I gave the 3,500 rupees (about £80) and the operation was done privately. She survived.

This chance act of charity has been repaid beyond measure. They asked me about my family, and were shocked and disturbed to learn that I was unmarried, that my twin brother and I were estranged and that my mother was living in a nursing home. How can this be? I felt abandoned, deprived, orphaned under their puzzled stare. "What happened?" they asked. Nothing. It is quite usual.

It is strange to see what you take for granted relativised by the practice of others. It is difficult to defend it as evidence of advanced society or a more enlightened dispensation than one in which ties of blood are not replaced by a paid division of labour.

Jagat was due to be married. Being an athlete, he is regarded as a good match. His mother prudently rejected some of the offers from well-to-do farmers in the neighbourhood, and settled for a woman from a more modest family with only a little land. She and Jagat liked each other, and were married in May 1992.

The family say that love-marriages cannot last. When a marriage is made by the people who love you best, and to whom your security and well-being is more important than any other consideration, it cannot so easily go wrong as when it is based upon a passing attraction, a momentary inclination. Of course, some terrible things happen in India; brides have been burned because they fail to bring enough dowry; violent antipathies have no easy way out of the bonds tied in this manner. But they know, too, that the west is full of lonely people, of elective relationships that have fallen apart, of what they see as incomprehensible dissolutions and abandonings. They know that psychological loneliness and social isolation are widespread.

They know the west is full of lonely people . . . that social isolation is widespread

Jagat and his wife said to me: "We will look after you when you are old. You will come and live with us and our children. We shall not let you be alone."

And they meant it. The friendship, he assured me, is friendship for life. We don't make friends one day, to cast them off the next. His family have, as it were, adopted me. A mature adult. This has given me a glimpse of the possibility that social security might mean something other than long waits on chained chairs in smoky rooms in order to petition functionaries behind toughened glass for enough money to survive the week.

It is a curious reversal, a poignant and touching variant on the aid, the help, the succour that the west is supposed to bring to the south. There is, surely, a lesson here, some instruction in humility, never really one of the salient features of the west. That we might have lost something, that our bondings, associations and relationships might be suffering in spite of our wealth and power, is usually dismissed as exotic romanticism.

But it isn't true. Whatever the advantages of life in the west—and they are too obvious to require enumeration—there are also deficiences and absences that we scarcely notice, so accustomed are we to setting the pace for the whole world. I have learned from Jagat and his family a kind of commitment, a form of friendship that is not always available in the west; where we have become cynical and instrumental in so many of our relationships with others.

In the hot afternoon, women are working in the fields around, gathering fodder for the cattle, fuel for cooking; they stoop in the tall crops and are lost to sight beneath the soft grass. Jagat's mother and sister stand on the mound that marks the boundary of their little piece of land. We turn round and wave. They stand and watch and wave until we are out of sight.

For the first time in four years Saba is ***not*** pregnant.

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Faced with a much larger and better-equipped Azeri army, the Armenians have prevailed, against all expectations. **Philip Marsden** finds out why

Winning a war on a wing and a prayer

Hadrout is a small Armenian town of burnt and shelled-out buildings on the southern side of Nagorno Karabakh in Azerbaijan. On three sides of the town, the mountains rise through forested slopes to grey limestone ridges; on the fourth side, to the east, is the yellowy haze of the plains.

The Armenians of the Nagorno Karabakh region have always looked uneasily to the east: east is Islam, east is the land of the Azeris, and east is flat. Flat land makes them nervous. The Armenian phrase you hear repeated over and over again in Hadrout is: *menk mer sarernenk*, "we are our mountains".

Hadrout is also the home town of Garry Kasparov's Armenian mother. It is from her, they tell you—from her Karabakhtsi mountain spirit—that he derives his combative genius. In the ruthlessly efficient end-game the Karabakh Armenians have played this year, in their steady accumulation of territory, in their calculated move into the plains to force the Azeris to the negotiating table, and in their rigid determination not to lose, it is a boast that seems hard to contend.

If the Armenians have won Karabakh, it is because their conviction is stronger than the Azeris'

Eighteen months ago, in the spring of 1992, the picture was very different. The Armenians of Karabakh were surrounded. They had been squeezed into an area around Stepanakert, the region's capital. For months the Azeris shelled the city from the cliffs. Confined to basements and shelters, without electricity, with water from only eight exposed springs, the Armenians managed to launch a counter-offensive. They scaled the cliffs and took the Azeri artillery positions. They then pushed on, emptying and burning the Azeri town of Lachin in order to open up a land corridor to the Armenian republic.

In June 1992, Azerbaijan elected the nationalist, pro-Turkish Abulfez Elchibey as president. He staged an immediate offensive from the north of Karabakh with a bold, bellicose cry: if a single Armenian remained in Karabakh by October, he promised, his people could hang him in the main square of Baku, Azerbaijan's capital. The offensive was almost successful. The Armenians were again forced back on Stepanakert, but by the spring they had regrouped in preparation for the most recent and decisive period of the war.

Elchibey did not hang. He was deposed, and lives in a remote village in Nachijevan. An old-guard Soviet, Haidar Aliev, has taken his place as president, and there is, for now, just a hint of dovish cooing between Aremenia's capital, Yerevan, Stepanakert and Baku.

The Armenians are, on the ground, in a strong position. They now hold not only most of Karabakh, but much of the land around it. This, they claim, is a buffer against the shelling, a *cordon sanitaire*.

Karen Baburian, Armenian president of Karabakh, is clear, though, that theyhave no territorial claims on Azerbaijan itself. "We will hand back the land outside Karabakh as soon as we have security guarantees."

As the first of the post cold-war conflicts, the Karabakh war has a particular poignancy. It bears out the disturbing truth of the new world order: that blood is thicker than water, that race has proved more enduring than ideology, that "right"—from the Caucasus to the Balkans—is now determined along ethnic lines. If the Armenians have, for the moment, won Karabakh it is because their conviction of right, under these terms, is stronger than the Azeris'.

"Look at our forces," said a young Armenian soldier as he swept a hand around his camp above Hadrout. "The Azeris have only conscripts, but here everyone wants to fight for their land!"

It was true. At night, you would see the dim lights of tractors crisscrossing the hillsides, bringing in the harvest; by day, the same tractor-drivers would take up their Kalashnikovs and go to the front. Touring the Armenian positions you see 15-year-old tank drivers alongside walnut-faced grandfathers.

And among the men is a scattering of women. One of these was Jana Galstian, deputy military commander of the Hadrout region. In calmer days, before 1988, Galstian had been an actress. She had played Shakespeare and Chekhov and Griboyedev and earned, from the authorities in Baku, the cherished order of merit, the *Zasluzhennaya Artistka*.

Her soldiers now call her "the Armenian Joan of Arc". She speaks "beautiful words", they say, "like Fidel Castro"; and in an environment where nobility is equated with masculinity, the ultimate accolade from a heavily bearded corporal: "that Jana, she is more a man than a woman".

One night, I wandered with her through the camp above Hadrout. It was late August and the Jebrail offensive was under way. Flares tinted the southern sky. Somewhere beyond them, not far from the Iranian border, tens of thousands of Azeris were fleeing their homes. The artillery barrage was continuous: outgoing Armenian shells, incoming Azeri shells.

Galstian sat for a few minutes at each of the camp fires, encouraging her troops. "Some of these men," she explained to me, "they still have stitches from being wounded. I try to keep them away from the front until they are well, but you see, it is impossible."

The Armenians' conviction is the key to understanding this war. It has helped to establish a hard nut of Armenian territory in a region—from Kurdistan to Abkhazia—that is rapidly fragmenting.

In part, this conviction is based on the belief that the Karabakh mountains have always been theirs—*menk mer sarernenk*, that the Azeris who made up about 22 per cent of Karabakh's population before the war are settlers. Azeri scholars counter this claim by saying that the Karabakhtsi Armenians are not real Armenians but assimilated Albanians.

But Galstian touched on a more recent source of Armenian tenacity, another reason for their fierce, unanimous resistance.

"It was kitchen talk," she explained. "Dur-

J C Tordai

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Triumph of the will: Armenia is winning for now, but can it carry on against the odds?

ing Stalin's time, the very mention of it could bring the KGB to the door. We knew it only from our grandmothers, the survivors, whispering it in the kitchen."

The pogroms against the Armenians in 1988 and the villages emptied by Soviet OMON troops in 1991 touched a raw nerve not only in Karabakh and the Armenian republic, but also among the diaspora, the three or four million Armenians scattered around the world. They knew this story well, of a collapsing empire lashing out at its militant fringes. They knew it from their grandparents too. In 1915, the Turks, dubious of their loyalties, had flushed the Armenians out of the ruins of the Ottoman empire. More than a million died then, and the rest were washed up in the Levant, the Caucasus and America.

The unresolved legacy of this, the first of the century's genocides, has given the issue of Karabakh an added potency. Over the past few years, from Moscow to Jerusalem, from Beirut to Sydney, Armenians have voiced their support. And a few, like the California-born Armenian, Avo "Monte" Melkonian, came to fight. "If we lose Karabakh," he said, echoing the fears of all Armenians, "we will be turning the last page of Armenian history."

Monte's picture now hangs in nearly every Armenian barracks in Karabakh. There is a hint of easy-going California in his face, though his teak-brown eyes, and his story, could only be Armenian.

Descended from survivors of the Turkish massacres, Melkonian graduated from University College of Los Angeles in 1978. He at once boarded a plane for Beirut where the 250,000-strong Armenian community was struggling to maintain its neutrality in the Lebanese civil war.

In Beirut, Melkonian joined the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA). He became involved in terrorist attacks on Turkish diplomats. When he was arrested in 1981 in Paris, on a false passport, his ASALA comrades were swift to act. Within hours, hand grenades were thrown at Paris harbour facilities; the following day a McDonald's in Paris was destroyed, French offices in Beirut were bombed, and within a week, bombs had been used against French property from Paris to Tehran. Such is the strength of Armenian nationalism.

"Ninety per cent of our tanks are captured; the Azeris are arming two armies—theirs and ours"

When Karabakh came under threat, Melkonian took his guerrilla expertise there. He participated in all the successful campaigns this year, trained recruits, toured villages and "encouraged grandmothers". On 12 July, during the battle for Agdam, surrounded by a group of Azeris, he was shot and killed.

"He came here as an ordinary soldier," his ADC told me with studied reverence, "but he died as a king." Such is his stature that the Armenians have renamed the town and region of Martouni, "Monteberd", or "the fortress of Monte".

The active support of Melkonian, the financial support of diaspora funds, the moral support of all Armenians—keen to assuage centuries of lost lands and massacres—have all bolstered the efforts of the Karabakh forces. But, given the extreme isolation of this mountain region, outside influence is often more vocal than material. "Ninety per cent of our tanks are captured," the Martouni commander told me. "The Azeris are arming two armies—theirs and ours."

I met Emil Abramamian in his office in Hadrout. He was the only surviving member of a group that helped to start the Karabakh movement in 1988. Every now and then our interview was interrupted by the whoosh of a GRAD missile launcher or the whine of the air-raid siren. Abramamian ignored both. I asked him about the chances for lasting peace.

"Peace?" he said wearily. "It will only come with a stable Russia."

Over the question of Karabakh, Moscow has most recently favoured the Armenians. But with Aliev in power and the vast oil reserves waiting to be tapped near Baku, their favour is expected to change.

The west too is getting oil fever. The UN and western governments have been quick to condemn the Armenian taking of Agdam, Fizuli and Jebrail. (Nothing was said when the Azeris were sweeping through northern Karabakh and raining GRAD missiles on Stepanakert.) To some Armenians, Aliev is playing a clever and dangerous game, on the one hand offering hope of talks, on the other courting allies who, once committed to oil investments, might overlook renewed Azeri offensives in Karabakh. The prospect of Azerbaijan becoming fat on oil also alarms Armenians. The "security guarantees" they demand for withdrawal seem a long way off.

In the meantime, it is still the name of Gorbachev—perhaps even more than the Azeris—which is spoken with contempt in Karabakh. They blame him for the war. They blame him, and perestroika, for opening the door on the chances of an autonomous Karabakh, only to slam it again in their face. They blame him for not sending the troops into Baku when the pogroms started. They blame him, in their more reflective moments, for forcing Azeris and Armenians to take up arms against each other.

In the hills above Hadrout, I joined a small reconnaissance unit. The first stage of the Jebrail offensive had met with mixed success, and there was some confusion. A sudden burst from a PEKA machine gun echoed from an Azeri position below us, answered by the shriller note of the Armenian assault rifles.

"You hear that?" the commander turned to me. "*That* is perestroika."

Philip Marsden's "The Crossing Place: a journey among the Armenians" has just been published by HarperCollins

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Watch their lips on welfare

The Conservatives are engaged in a staggering disinformation exercise about the future of the welfare state. Their actions are so brazen that it seems embarrassingly obvious to point this out. And yet, if they are allowed to go on making their exaggerated claims about acting in the best interests of the poor and needy, it is possible that some people will be deceived.

Peter Lilley's speech to the Young Conservatives at the end of last month on the "welfare society" is a case in point. Having satisfied the rednecks at the Tory party conference two years running with his "little list" of scroungers and his bile against foreigners, he has recently been adopting a more measured, but no less cynical, tone.

The purpose of his long-term review of social security was, "to make sure we *can* meet our obligations towards the sick, the jobless, the elderly, the needy, families and disabled people well into the next century", he said. Note the emphasis on the word "can". Behind his emollient words lay the threat that the whole welfare edifice could collapse.

His speech was littered with clues about what was in the pipeline in the budget, including the decision to cut people's entitlement to unemployment benefit from 12 to six months. Lilley said: "The longer people stay on benefit the more their motivation declines, their skills grow stale and the less attractive they become to employers." Put like that, it was as though the government was doing the unemployed a favour.

He went on: "It would be unthinkable in the United Kingdom and most European countries to terminate all help to the unemployed after a given time as in the US—certainly we are not considering it." With hindsight, the word "all" has turned out to be crucial. There was also another threat: things could be worse, as in the US, and "we" are not considering it (yet).

Towards the end of his speech, he offered a vision of the sunlit uplands to which the government is leading us. "We want to go beyond [the welfare state] and enhance welfare provision by developing from the welfare state into the welfare society. By this I mean enabling people to build, on the platform provided by basic state welfare, additional provision for themselves and their families." Before falling for this prospectus, it would be wise to check how high and broad that basic "platform" is going to be.

Lilley believes his intentions are honorable. He commented: "It was that great Tory Samuel Johnson who said, 'The true test of a cvilised society is generous provision for the poor.'" But his words have to be put in the context of the "opt-out" society. If you are paying for private insurance against sickness, unemployment and retirement, you might consider it very generous to spend any money at all on people who had not bothered, for whatever reason, to provide for themselves.

As a smart politician, Lilley knows how to get under the skin of the Labour Party. "The dependency culture [can] no longer be dismissed as a right-wing fantasy," he said. Of course, every supporter of the welfare state knows that the benefits system produces a poverty trap. But he did not attempt to offer an escape route out of it. Instead, he merely foreshadowed the budget changes to unemployment and invalidity benefit, as if all that was needed was to give the workshy a jolt.

The work of the Social Justice Commission could not be more different. It is already clear from the handful of pamphlets that have been published that the commission is exploring ways of lifting people out of poverty, instead of reviving turn-of-the-century distinctions between the deserving and undeserving. It has not received much thanks for its efforts so far. It recent paper, *Making Sense of Benefits*, has sent alarm bells ringing on the left because it proposed to abandon the use of the words "universal" and "targeted" benefits. But, as Lilley has shown, you can use soothing language to mean anything; while a bit of honesty can cause all sorts of misunderstanding.

You can use soothing language to mean anything, while a bit of honesty causes misunderstanding

At a conference at the TUC last weekend on the future of the welfare state, chaired by Ken Livingstone, the opening speaker, Professor Peter Townsend, was introduced as someone who had been snubbed and ignored by the commission. The pin-pricks and jibes continued all morning.

Townsend's contribution was actually very valuable. He made the point that the Tories' tax changes had saved the richest 20 per cent of the population £30 billion over the years. But everyone then jumped to the wrong conclusion: that the welfare state could be put to rights by simply by taking that money back.

If it were that simple, there would no need for a Social Justice Commission at all. Gordon Brown would merely have to introduce an adventurous, redistributive budget in his first year in office. And, in fact, that is what most people at the conference wanted.

The presence on the platform of Bryan Gould, Bill Morris of the T&G and John Edmonds of the GMB was evidence that the Social Justice Commission is being criticised as part of the continuing attack on Labour's economic policy. Mocking Brown, Morris said, "You cannot manage your economy solely on the basis of closing tax loopholes", while Edmonds denounced the "lies" in the Labour movement that were being peddled about the affordability of the welfare state.

"After 20 years of retreat, it is time for the left to turn and fight," said Gould. "It's a stark choice between universality and means-testing." Yet, he at least understood that the existing welfare state need not be preserved in aspic. He was interested in the idea of a basic citizen's income, he said. There might even be better ways of distributing child benefit, he told the *Independent on Sunday* (but not the conference).

The Social Justice Commission deserves better treatment from the labour movement. It is attempting something genuinely ambitious. Its brief is not to save the Treasury money, as the Tories want to; but nor is it solely concerned with relieving poverty. It wants to adapt the welfare state to the society in which we actually work and live.

In *Work and Welfare*, a pamphlet published by the commission this week, Paul Gregg points out that the labour market has changed. There is now a growing divide between "work-rich" and "work-poor" families—more dual earner couples alongside no earner couples. Educated women marry educated men and enjoy a high standard of living, while unskilled men suffer disproportionately from unemployment, and their wives may at best be in a low-waged, part-time job (where, if they earn too much, income support is lost). More money under the existing system will merely keep them in poverty. Why not make benefits more flexible to meet their needs?

At the moment, the Social Justice Commission is still exploring options. Contrary to reports in the press, its paper on *Social Justice, Children and Families* by Penelope Leach and Patricia Hewitt, to be published next week, does not come out in favour of abolishing universal child benefit. It sets out seven options, including scrapping it, and examines the pros and cons. Is that so terrible?

With both Lilley and the Social Justice Commission, it is worth reading the small print and taking into account the spirit as well as the letter of their words.

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SIDELINERS

Fifty years ago, a respected Washington journalist earned his top reputation by cycling from government department to foreign embassy, painstakingly putting together news stories without the need for "leaks" from warring factions. Until recently, it looked as though Alan Milburn, Darlington's new Labour MP, would be the parliamentary equivalent. This derived from his recent dramatic discovery, after painstaking questioning, that the NHS has spent £75 million to £100 million on advertising and PR to sell its "reforms". He launched this with considerable panache, adding how many former Tory politicians, (Lords Hayhoe, Jenkin and Glenarthur) had been found NHS jobs, together with Tory spouses (Lord Parkinson's, Lord Archer's, Sir Teddy Taylor's, Gillian Shephard's).

In fact, his 20 months as an MP have shown 35-year-old Milburn is a candidate for the job of rebuilding the north-east's economy, should a Labour government launch a Northern Regional Assembly. Before becoming an MP, he was senior business coordinator for North Tyneside council and author of three pamphlets, including "Plan for the North" and "The Case for Regional Government". His recent speeches have combined deep analysis with skilfully extracted facts.

Already talent-spotted by my neighbour, Edward Pearce, as having "enormous energy, rough north-eastern geniality" and being "very bright", Milburn hit the parliamentary turf running. His May 1992 Maiden concentrated on Darlington as the railways' birthplace and site of heavy industry, including Cleveland Structural Engineering, winner of the contract for the world's biggest bridge, Hong Kong's Tsing Ma. He complained about the drop in the north's industrial investment and in local training. He contrasted the Tories' investment of £2.5 billion in their "worthless flagship", London Docklands, with cuts in the industrial north. The £248.7 million paid LDDC in 1991-92 was "almost as much as the total paid to nine other corporations", including ones in the Black Country, Tyne and Wear, Manchester, Teesside, Leeds and Sheffield.

He has scored locally with his disclosures, the first in March 1992, about plans for an unwelcome merger of Darlington's health authority with neighbouring South-west Durham. Deceitfully denied, the merger was belatedly admitted after sham consultation.

Milburn shows a capacity for a wide range of simultaneous activities. After local deregulation resulted in attracting 239 buses into Darlington's town centre in one hour, he was able to organise a parliamentary motion with 120 MPs as signatories. He has fought to ban fur farms, as "wildlife hellholes". Inspired perhaps by his psychiatrist partner, Dr Ruth Friel, he has fought for funds for drugs and alcohol rehabilitation centres. He has crusaded against shotgun certificates being held by 12 year olds. And he can fight political battles without unnecessary partisanship. He was even generous enough to tell Geoffrey Dickens that he "spoke a lot of sense . . . on this occasion".

EDWARD PEARCE

It might be a better idea all round if we handed Hong Kong over to Peking, not Beijing

Give Douglas Hurd credit—faced with The End of the World, no one would announce it with so much civilised insouciance, declining to make too much of a distastefully flashy message.

He only had to deal on Monday with Hong Kong's Governor Patten doing the decent thing, pressing on with the slow ballet of democratisation in the teeth of virulence from the mainland. Mr Hurd is very good at being polite about people in a way to make them feel rotten. "I shan't beat you, Carruthers-Chung; it would be inappropriate, but you will come to realise that your conduct, quite apart from embarrassing the House and Mr Major, reflects upon you personally and that conclusions will be drawn. You may go now."

I love it; only way to talk to the bastards. But quite what are we supposed to do about Hong Kong, except go on being plucky and pluralist in the teeth of people on the mainland whose only recommendation is that they aren't Boris Yeltsin?

Why should the Foreign Secretary jettison a perfectly good English form for the name of a Chinese city?

Jack Cunningham for Labour managed everything by staying safely in the interrogative mode. "What on Earth has gone wrong?" he asked, hinting at government error but not pushing it, though his quotation from a piece by Sir Percy Craddock was unwise. Compliance Craddock is by all accounts, livid at being cut out of things by Mr Patten who yearns, unlike Sir Percy, for a late flowering of free institutions before the blade comes down. Mr Patten is missed in this government. He is such an unlikely Tory.

Mr Cunningham is, though, a man too lightly criticised. He is said not to have made an impression in the FO slot. But how on earth do you make an impression when foreign policy itself is largely graceful commentary upon events out of reach or control? Most foreign policy is now rhetoric, and opposition foreign policy the ghost of rhetoric. Anyway, with the former foreign spokesman, Gerald Kaufman, lingering like a breath of stale air, making his assistant master's jellied sarcasms, one appreciates Mr Cunningham.

But Hong Kong is also a slate on which all sorts of things can be cheekily written. James Molyneaux remarked upon widespread support in Northern Ireland for democratic principles and hoped that the notion of the group with greater numbers prevailing might be assured. For a man who smiles by the conceded millimetre, he looked remarkably cheerful. And Mr Hurd took this grim Presbyterian joke gaily and with audible italics. It was an admirable *principle*.

Dennis Skinner also tried a cannon shot off the domestic cushion, contrasting democracy of the elected sort favoured by Mr Patten with a board of tyrannical nominees indicated by mainland China, along, he thought, the Lords' model. Their blissful and unoffending Lordships, who haven't seriously terrorised anything since Lord Willoughby de Broke gave Asquith a bad time in 1909, will be charmed.

Faced with Mr Cunningham's queries, Mr Hurd lightly observed that, "Most of them would better be referred to Peking". My notes at this point read "Peking already!" Could this be a verbal slip, when the national press has slavishly turned itself to the suitably ugly "Beijing"? No slip at all. Mr Hurd has a doctrine, as he made clear to a Tory questioner, David Harris, slipping nervously into "the complete intransigence of Beijing".

The Foreign Secretary saw no reason to use that form. He didn't say "Roma" or "Bruxelles" or "Moskva", so why should he jettison a perfectly good English form for the name of a distinguished Chinese city? It isn't all that distinguished these days. The awful Mao regime pulled down more of the finest bits than three sets of developers let loose on a cathedral city. But we know what he means and could scarce forbear to cheer.

Only the French are as stroppy as the Chinese about their own forms. And the abject francophilia of the Michelin-spotting British middle class has led to surrender over "Lyons" and almost, "Marseilles". Catch a Frog saying anything except "Pékin"!

Meanwhile, the Americans are armed by ignorance against all *amour propre*. "Is this Ley-ces-ter?" Defiance of foreigners strikes a deep chord because done so seldom. It was a refusal of the Kow Tow, something which has caused trouble in the past.

But what the hell. Given there is nothing we can do except make decent gestures about elections, not being cringingly polite to the heavies is a luxury we can treat ourselves to.

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LETTERS

Someone once said of Kenneth Baker, when he was education secretary, "I have seen the future—and it smirks." The same could be said of Kenneth Clarke, who really could have the future leadership of the Conservative Party within his chubby grasp. The Economist had a picture of the smirking Clarke on its front cover after his budget last week. "They bought it," read the caption. Maybe.

Certainly Clarke's budget seems to have confused the left. So much of it resembled what Labour had been proposing—or ought to have been proposing if it had the courage, or would have implemented if it had been in office—that it was difficult at times to take John Smith's for-once angry, impassioned response altogether seriously. Petrol and tobacco tax rises, cuts in mortgage tax relief, action on tax loopholes were all broadly to be welcomed.

Of course, the budget contained at least one truly vicious measure: the halving of the period of entitlement to unemployment benefit. But most of the really bad news had either already been announced (VAT increases and the 1 per cent national insurance hike), or is yet to come (swingeing cuts in public expenditure to meet the new spending targets or to compensate for unrealistic growth projections). It made it much more difficult to paint Clarke's conjuring trick as the swingeing attack on the less well-off that it actually is.

Leslie Moody, of London SE3, makes this point in a letter this week. Moody says that when shadow chancellor Gordon Brown was "analysing Clarke's proposals and exposing their iniquitous realities, he was brilliant. When he sought to explain what Labour would have wanted instead, he was unconvincing. We were offered the now-familiar mantra about more training for skills, more investment for growth, and closing the taxation loopholes."

All admirable objectives, which might begin to bite in two or three years' time. But what would Labour in office do now, asks Moody? He says the only question to be answered is who should bear the cost. "Should it be those who can afford to make sacrifices or those who are already vulnerable and teetering on the edge of real poverty? Kenneth Clarke is in no doubt. Adding 1 per cent to national insurance ensures that the burden will be borne by ordinary workers. From April, their pay packets will be reduced by up to £4 per week. But it remains at £4 per week for those on salaries 10 or 20 times the national average.

"The only alternative to Clarke's budget is a steep increase in taxation for the really rich, which would make it unnecessary to attack the unemployed and disabled. The experts, including, I am sorry to say, Gordon Brown, seek to convince us that increases in direct taxation would act as a disincentive and, by reducing spending power, would harm an already fragile economy."

Moody repeats the old conundrum. "Would somebody (Gordon Brown perhaps?) explain to me why, if the chairman of British Telecom (for example) is required to pay tax he is well able to afford, that will be a disincentive impairing seriously his willingness to give of his best, whereas if a BT worker sees his disposable income reduced in April by £8 per week, that will not be? Will that same somebody also explain why, if Mr Vallance's purchasing power is curtailed, that is bad for the economy, whereas if the purchasing power of his staff is reduced, that is not?"

It is not just Kenneth Clarke who does conjuring tricks. The whole Thatcherite economic project was founded on illusion. Its single most abiding achievement, moreover—a massive redistribution of tax burdens from the rich to the poor—was conducted by means of a fraud. Under the pretext of reducing taxes for all workers, the Conservatives in fact reduced them for only the very highest paid. And of all those ordinary workers who suffered from their tax policies, enough were conned into the belief that they were actually benefiting (or at least that they would suffer more under Labour) to win an incompetent government a fourth term in office. John Smith—and the rest of us—have good reason to be angry.

Steve Platt

Let us not be riven

As a member of Labour's Northern Regional Executive, I am horrified to witness the excruciating blow that Walworth Road is imposing on our very strong and solid organisation in the Northern Region. Our demise would have severe implications for the whole Labour movement in Britain. My wish to write in its defence is based on my commitment to regional identity and my understanding of the needs of many Labour supporters who have expressed grave concern about this decision.

Labour has always maintained a healthy distrust of centralised power. Over the years, the Northern Region has given northern Labour members a sense of regional pride and identity. It has also provided workers with tremendous resources and practical support. Abolition of the region would, without doubt, damage morale and centralise resources, thus alienating many members throughout northern England. More dangerously, it would imply that Labour is no longer the party of regional government; we would give the Tories a further stick to beat us with.

The effectiveness of the regional structure lies in its capacity to coordinate campaigning. The Northern Region played a significant role in leading protest against the mine closure debacle, and it has also forged and sustained important links with Europe. In acting on the interests of those it represents, the Northern Region has exemplified the role of regional government: to meet those needs that are specifically localised. If abolition takes place, this will no longer be possible. Abolition would detonate the hopes of, and dispossess, many valuable and valued Labour workers. It would, I believe, jeopardise our most basic principles of accountability, democracy and regional power. Let us, as a party, concentrate on winning the next election and presenting a unified policy. Let us not be riven with further internal squabbles, which will achieve nothing but bad publicity and bad feeling.

David Martin Abrahams
Labour Party Northern Regional Executive
Newcastle Upon Tyne

A typical attack

Kenneth Clarke's announcement in the budget of a 10 per cent cut in the student grant is nothing less than an attack on the right to a free education. It will lead to many poorer students dropping out of their courses or being deterred even from entering higher education.

Students already suffer from low grants and crippling debt, and now they are being hit with an additional 10 per cent cut. This will mean more than £700 of additional debt for the average student during the course of a three-year degree. At the same time, many of the services students get from student unions are under threat from John Patten's Education Bill.

What incentive is there for young people to go into higher education and gain the skills they need to contribute to regenerating our economy, and making us competitive again? None. Education will soon become the preserve of a privileged few who can afford it. So much for John Major's "classless society".

It is typical of this government that it has chosen to attack one of the most financially vulnerable groups in society to make up for its economic mismanagement.

Luke Akehurst
Convener
National Union of Students
Bristol Area

It ain't necessarily so

It would be uncharitable to conclude that your editorial ("The great political turn-off", 3 December) was written in a mood of celebration that Campaign for Real Ale member Ken Clarke had declined to increase duty on beer, but there is only one sober and sensible reaction to your conclusion: Aargh! It is clearly true that alienation from the official political process, which is increasing apace, does not mean alienation from all political activity. People are turning to grassroots protests and, in effect, direct democracy.

Is it really true, however, that: "Herein lie the attitudinal roots of a potential new authoritarianism"? Well, maybe it is if socialists lie in their beds and let the BNP's Derek Beackon and his mates get on with their job of finding *other* people to

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blame for their problems. But if socialists get out on the high streets, on the housing estates and (gasp) in the workplace, and show people how those protesting against roadbuilding, those concerned about rail privatisation and people who want a greener world (to use one example) all have a common interest in fighting a mad economic system, then it ain't necessarily so.

Keith Flett
London N17

Time for more humility

"Patrick Mayhew points out that 67 per cent of people in Northern Ireland vote for parties supporting the Union" (John Cole, 3 December). Some, maybe many, people are not on the electoral register. In the 1992 general election, 33 per cent of the electorate did not vote—a considerably higher figure than in Great Britain. Of the votes cast, 67 per cent went to Unionists, including the Alliance. This was fewer than 45 per cent of the electorate, and even less of "the people".

A vote for a party does not imply total support for its policies. By no means are all Unionist voters opposed to compromise for peace. It is possible that a majority of Northern Ireland people are as intransigent about the Union as the Unionist leaders, but this is not nearly substantiated by election statistics.

Ian Paisley, the leader of the Ulster Unionists, frequently claims to speak for "the people of Northern Ireland". At the general election, he obtained the votes of only one third of his North Antrim constituents—fewer than the number of those who abstained.

In 1992, the "apathy party" did particularly well in Northern Ireland, among both communities. This reflects disillusionment and cynicism about the political process and politicians, and helps to explain disparities between election results and opinion polls. It suggests that more humility among politicians would be timely.

Eric Robinson
Chorley
Lancashire

THIS ENGLAND

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• She had invited a Marxist couple, but the Marxist husband struck her unfavourably. "I remember I was so proud that I'd managed to find avocados and how rude he was about them. He didn't know how to eat them, he was the son of a miner. What was this disgusting luxury? He was horrid—he was positively fuelled by hatred." The next morning, she called Conservative Central Office and asked to be put on the candidates' list.—Profile of Emma Nicholson in the *Independent* (Derek Morgan)

Min Cooper

The other opposition

You are right to point out Labour's timidity on economics ("A budget for recovery", 26 November), and its willingness to follow the Tory agenda.

However, there is a party that is committed to a progressive and fair taxation system, more public spending, and is prepared to say where the cash will come from. Only the Liberal Democrats are pledged to abolish mortgage interest tax relief; to raise the top rate of tax in order to free resources for investment in infrastructure and thus job creation.

The Labour Party may have given up on these issues but, thankfully, they are not the only opposition party.

Jon Whitehouse
York

Unlikely accomplices

The striking absence from Stuart Hall's otherwise thought-provoking article ("Thatcherism today", 26 November) was any mention of the international dimension of the beast, and even more, of the sort of alternative around which the left could be reconstituted. Curious that after the Tories' Euro-divisions—which not so long ago threatened to bring down John Major as they had done Thatcher herself—it should be possible to gloss over the recidivist nationalism of the Thatcherite project; worrying that the dismal role of Major and Hurd in fostering European and transatlantic indifference to global suffering in the new wars of the 1990s went unremarked.

If there is one big sign of the crisis of community and social reciprocity that afflicts our society, it is our sharing in this indifference. If there is one big sign of the failure of the left, it is that we have not found a language or forms of action to challenge official complacency. We found our voices over Vietnam, over the bomb, over apartheid—but the Bosnian genocide, and its counterparts worldwide, leave us silent and embarrassed, accomplices of neo-Thatcherism. Does it not deepen Hall's case to note that Thatcher herself found a way of speaking out on Bosnia that struck home far more than anything said by anyone to the left of John Major?

Martin Shaw
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
University of Hull

Not loathsome enough

Ian Aitken says that John Major needs a Willie Whitelaw-like figure to rein in the loony right ("Reining in the right", 26 November). However, I think we should recall what happened when America's loathsome Republican Party fielded its own far-right zealot in the form of Pat Buchanan in the US elections last year. It was obliterated as just about everyone with a functioning cerebellum deserted it for the Democrats, to escape Buchanan's raving fundamentalism.

I therefore urge *NSS* to back Michael Portillo and Peter Lilley as the new "dream ticket" for the Tory party leadership; then perhaps this could have a similar effect. You could devise a series of new policy documents: "The Welfare State: who needs it?" or "Slash Wage Costs—Bring Back Slavery". On second thoughts, this isn't quite such a good idea. Messrs Lilley and Portillo would never accept documents like those. They are simply too left wing.

Tom Farrell
Dublin
Ireland

Coming home to roost

In response to Robert Philpot's letter on the assassination of Kennedy and Fidel Castro's relations with his administration (Letters, 3 December), the decision to assassinate Castro was made back in the Eisenhower regime, when such "executive actions" were targeted against Patrice Lumumba, Abdul Kassem, Rafael Trujillo and Castro. Only the latter two were alive by the time JFK entered the White House. The role of the CIA in the deaths of the Congolese and Iraqi leaders is somewhat moot. The Agency certainly tried to poison both of them, and lent all available material counsel and assistance to the assassins. After the Bay of Pigs, JFK countermanded the assassination order against Trujillo. The Dominican conspirators went ahead anyway. The CIA had supplied them with carbines and later excused itself from direct culpability by pointing to the fact that the ballistics tests showed Trujillo to have been killed by handguns and shotguns.

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The CIA officer William Taplin ("Propaganda of the deed", 26 November) was making a judicious assessment, by no means unfriendly to the Kennedys, of the relations between the CIA and White House in the postwar period. As a former CIA operations officer, he merely corroborated the well-attested fact that the Kennedy brothers involved themselves in clandestine CIA operations to an extraordinary degree. For example, Harris Wofford, then Bobby's aide and now a US senator, told John Ranelagh, writing a history of the CIA in the mid-1970s, that: "The Attorney General was the driving force behind the clandestine effort to overthrow Castro. From inside accounts of the pressure he was putting on the CIA to 'get Castro', he seemed like a wild man who was out-CIAing the CIA."

By late 1963, Castro had been the target of more than two dozen assassination plots, eight of them (on his estimates) attributable to the CIA. On 9 September, he issued a direct warning, widely quoted in the US press, that: "United States leaders should think that if they are aiding terrorist plans to eliminate Cuban leaders, they themselves will not be safe."

As he spoke these words, a new bid was in train, involving a member of Castro's cabinet, Rolando Cubela, code-named AM-LASH. As was disclosed in intimate detail by the Church Committee in the mid-1970s, the CIA worked eagerly with Cubela, who demanded evidence of White House approval for an assassination bid, and duly got it in the form of a phrase introduced in a fiery JFK speech against Castro. Then a senior CIA official, Desmond Fitzgerald, was sent to Paris as a "personal emissary" of the Kennedys. He had with him a poisoned pen developed by the CIA's technical division. Cubela promised to give it to Castro. As Fitzgerald and Cubela left their rendezvous they heard that JFK had been killed in Dallas.

As US intelligence intercepts showed, Castro's most immediate reaction to news of the killing was fear that he would be regarded as its sponsor, and that the US would launch a full invasion. He knew of the Kennedy-sponsored efforts to kill him. Hence his 9 September warning. So whether he took French journalist John Daniel's peace mission seriously is somewhat moot. He certainly had a pressing reason for demonstrating his chagrin. If Castro had any need for a reality check on the political morals of the Kennedy administration in the fall of 1963, he didn't have to look further than the bodies of the Diem brothers in South Vietnam, who had become an inconvenient obstruction to US policy and who paid the price in October.

There is no "plethora of evidence" suggesting Oswald was not the killer. Indeed, serious recent assessments have confirmed the Warren Commission's initial finding. The 1976 House Committee formed to investigate the killings of JFK and Martin Luther King corroborated the case built by the Commission. It did allege that a fourth shot had been fired, thus suggesting a conspiracy. The sonic evidence for this claim was subsequently discredited. I recommend Gerald Posner's recent *Case Closed* to conspiracy buffs, with the reservation that Posner—while shooting down all the absurd hypotheses confected over the years—offered an unsatisfactory picture of Oswald, a man who quit the Soviet Union because he found it "too bourgeois". Like Castro, the US left was panic-stricken at the thought of being blamed for the killing. At a distance of 30 years, I imagined it now safe to point out that Oswald was acting from what he saw as left-wing beliefs. I never said I approved of his action. I don't. But the man assassinated in Dealey Plaza on 22 November 1963 was certainly himself a sponsor of assassination bids. As Malcolm X said at the time, the assassination was a case of "chickens coming home to roost, and who can be against that".

Alexander Cockburn
Petrolia
US

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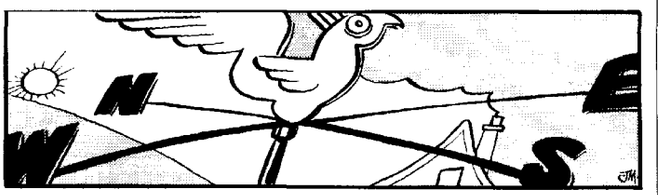

Colin Ward laments the theft of the happy habitat

In the 1970s, when addressing teachers, geographers or environmental psychologists on the urban scene as a learning experience, I often found that they would dig into their bags or briefcases and produce a photocopy of an article from an American magazine, *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*. The passage they all remembered was a recollection by Albert Eide Parr, of childhood experience in a Norwegian port in this century.

"Not as a chore, but as an eagerly awaited pleasure, I was often entrusted with the task of buying fish and bringing it home alone. This involved the following: walking to the station in five to ten minutes; buying a ticket; watching train with coal-burning steam locomotive pull in; boarding train; riding across long bridge over shallows separating small-boat harbour (on the right) from ship's harbour (on the left), including small naval base with torpedo boats . . . leaving train at terminal . . . walking by and sometimes entering fisheries' museum; passing central town park where military band played during midday break; strolling by central shopping and business district, or alternatively passing fire station with horses at ease under suspended harnesses . . . and continuing past centuries-old town hall and other ancient buildings; exploration of fish market and fleet; selection of fish; haggling about price; purchase and return home."

The important thing about his story is that Parr was four years old at the time. I later got to know him before his death in his nineties two years ago. He was the former director of the American Museum of Natural History and in his retirement became a campaigner for "The Happy Habitat"—not just protesting about the exclusion of children from the urban scene, but for a more diversified and interesting townscape than the one we know, which is a commercial emporium, redeveloped for the benefit of the out-of-town, male, middle-aged and middle-class motorist.

Somehow we've managed to divert attention to different targets. A shortened letter in the *Guardian* on 26 November noting campaigns about "stranger danger", urging children to "yell, run and tell" if approached by an unknown adult, suggested that they "seek to inculcate paranoia at a tender age". It came from three academics in the field of transport studies, John Adams, Mayer Hillman and John Whitelegg.

The paper found no space for their significant findings, which were that, in 1971, 80 per cent of seven- and eight-year olds went to school on their own but, by 1990, only 9 per cent were allowed to do so; and that while two-thirds of children in 1971 owned a bicycle, 90 per cent have one now, but only 2 per cent of children cycle to school (*One False Move . . . A study of children's independent mobility*, Policy Studies Institute, 1991). They note that this change has happened "largely unremarked and unresisted", that "children have lost out without society apparently noticing", and make comparisons with German cities. They pursue the theme in a new book, *Children, transport and the quality of life* (Policy Studies Institute, 1993).

But instead of debating the way in which the use of the environment has been stolen from children, we seize upon a tragedy of child murder, and are encouraged by the government to become truancy vigilantes. Decades ago, the researchers John and Elizabeth Newson got an instant answer to the simple question, "Would you call him/her an indoor or an outdoor child?" Today we take it for granted that the outdoor child is up to no good. Why can't they stay at home with their computer games?

With wicked subtlety we have shifted the blame for the attrition of the public habit from the creators of the contemporary urban scene, with its neglect of everything that doesn't earn money and the unchallenged dominance of the motorist, to the children who in any previous generation might have found in it a *happy* habitat.

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The modern movement really began when mathematicians went beyond Euclid and pursued formalism rather than meaning, suggests **Jeremy Gray**

The shock of the new maths

For far too many, science is an alien and incomprehensible activity, having little or no cultural or intellectual connection with other human pursuits. Yet such a view is the direct opposite of the truth. Even mathematics, seemingly the most abstract and rarefied of disciplines, bears the stamp of the culture that produced it.

A good example is the change that might seem to have made mathematics less accessible than ever—the transition to modern mathematics at the start of this century. It is possible to see this not merely as a change (some would say, revolution) in mathematics, but as a part of the modernist transformation of culture.

Modernism in all the arts was a self-conscious turning away from accepted, traditional modes. Meaning became problematic, no longer inherited from tradition, but questioned, abandoned, and, if conferred, conferred in a self-enclosed way. A painter like Kokoschka would suppress objects in favour of the direct expression of the emotions previously elicited by the representation of the objects. Reality, if admitted at all, was handled in novel and sophisticated ways, as, for example, in Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Remarkably, the same is true of mathematics. Indeed, modernism in mathematics arguably preceded modernism in the arts. Take geometry, for example: by 300 BC, Euclid's *Elements* had seemingly captured in words what everyone took to be the defining features of, for example, lines. His postulates, which we now tend to call axioms, merely codified what seemed too basic to be capable of proof.

For more than 2000 years they remained unquestioned, yet it should have been obvious that some, at least, were open to doubt. For instance, the famous fifth postulate—that parallel lines never meet—is not true on curved surfaces. Eventually, by about 1900, it had become clear that there were several different kinds of line (one for each geometry) and confidence in the meaning of Euclidean terms had been misplaced.

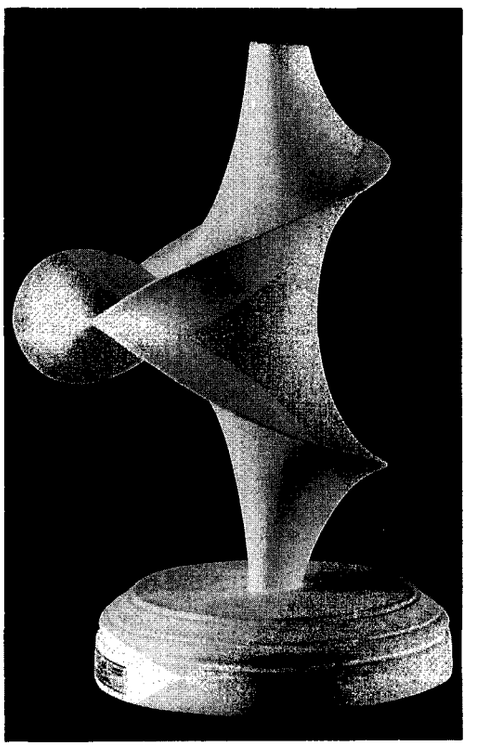
The seeds of modernism in geometry lie in the realisation that there was not even a unique, physically plausible geometry. There were at least two, Euclidean and the so-called non-Euclidean geometry. This had been discovered by two obscure mathematicians around 1830, Bolyai in Hungary and Lobachevsky (he of Tom Lehrer fame) in Russia, but had not been accepted. Acceptance came after their deaths for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the realisation that all one needed to do geometry was a set of points and a way to measure distances between them.

In 1868, this was coupled to a specific way of describing non-Euclidean geometry and the damage was done. Henceforth there were two different ways of describing space. One might hope that experiments would choose between them (this was tried, without success), but it would still leave the incorrect geometry as a logically consistent construction. This geometry would be valid, but apparently meaningless, mathematics.

Perhaps the key text that consummated moves already under way, is David Hilbert's *Foundations of Geometry*, a little book first published in 1899. There Hilbert, already established as the leading German mathematician of his generation, proposed an entirely axiomatic approach to geometry. He prescribed the rules governing what one could say about undefined entities called points, lines, and planes. Different sets of rules gave different geometries. Out went any idea of meanings gained from experience, and it then became easy to see how there could be many geometries, not just the familiar Euclidean one. It became possible to create geometries almost at will.

Hilbert broke with the tradition that it was the precise meaning of mathematical terms that made mathematics so reliable. Instead, he proposed a rigorous study of the rules of deduction in mathematics, and gave up meaning altogether. To the physicist he said, in effect, try out any of these geometries. I can vouch for their mathematical soundness—you tell me of their physical significance. It was as if the mathematician should deal with the syntax, leaving the semantics to anyone who wanted to borrow these languages for their own purposes. Evidently, modern geometry was every bit as modernist as contemporary literature. And, like the novelist, the mathematician was expected to control this newly liberated creativity only by some aesthetic sense.

The tradition that Hilbert exemplified was largely, but not exclusively, German, but other leading mathematical nations were also actively involved in modernising mathematics. In Italy, Guiseppe Peano was not only energetically formalising geometry, but looking for ways to write all of mathematics in a new formal language so that untrustworthy intuitions could be held in check. In his view, the newly rigorous calculus showed clearly that intuition, especially geometrical or pictorial intuition, was a poor guide to discovery. The emphasis had to be shifted on to more reliable methods of reasoning.



Kuen's surface: Mathematics or art?

In France, the most prominent mathematician, Henri Poincaré, had been an early advocate of non-Euclidean geometry. Poincaré could accept all that Hilbert had to say on mathematical grounds about axiomatic geometry.

But when others sought to give a similar treatment to other concepts, especially that of number, Poincaré rebelled. He took up a resolutely psychologist position, according to which mathematical concepts were built up out of our basic experiences of living in a material world. He stood up against the modernist vanguard, but only in a modernist way. Both he and they reinterpreted familiar concepts in terms of new, resolutely mathematical (or logical) ones.

One reason for this was the separation of mathematics and physics, which took place slowly but inexorably throughout the 19th century. What had been a sprawling union became two largely separate empires, with different university premises, different staff, different concerns. It was hard to work in both

Friedrich Vieweg & Sohn

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fields, although both Poincaré and Hilbert tried. Even applied mathematics, which had evolved as a discipline to fill the gap, looked to physicists little different from any other mathematics. Conversely, mathematicians, divorced from contact with physics, could no longer accept that the objects they studied were merely idealisations of physical objects. From this separation of disciplines came a separation of philosophies: on one side the naive ontologies of the physicists grappling daily with (to be sure, elusive) physical objects; on the other, increasing formalism. Modernism in geometry had begun.

The question of the truth was made urgent by the existence of non-Euclidean geometry. Once raised, other puzzles presented themselves forcefully. For example, in two-dimensional projective geometry, one could take any proven statement and replace the words "point" with "line" and "line" with "point", and likewise swap around the phrases "lie on a line" and "meet in a point". The trick replaces one true statement with another, and so any valid proof with another, thus considerably increasing the number of theorems of this geometry with no extra work.

So excited were mathematicians by this duality, as it was called, that whole passages of books were written in double-column format so that the reader could savour the exchange. But while it makes sense intuitively to think of a line as made up of all the points on it, it doesn't feel easy to think of a point as somehow made up of all the lines through it. The duality is fine mathematically, but nonsense intuitively. All of which threw into question the relation of mathematics to intuition. Duality in projective geometry is one of the reasons why Hilbert took the radical step that he did.

The professional separation of mathematicians and physicists is the social context, and the novel geometries the internal engine, governing the modernist move in geometry. It is striking that although the mathematics was in place, it took Einstein's theories of relativity to shake up our notions of space and time. That might be because, as a physicist, Einstein remained nearer to the (possible) meanings of the terms.

Nor, quite reasonably, did all of mathematics go the modernist way. There were comparable moves in algebra, in the foundations of the calculus, even of mathematics itself. But many mathematicians continued to do good old-fashioned calculations, just as many architects turned out houses, not machines for living in, and authors wrote books with recognisable characters dealing with recognisable dilemmas.

Modernism in mathematics, as elsewhere, went on to become an orthodoxy, but not a monolith. Seeing that it grew up alongside other modernisms may help to see mathematics as a cultural activity, not too different from any other. It prompts the question: is there a postmodernist mathematics?

Jeremy Gray is a senior lecturer in mathematics at the Open University with a particular interest in the history of modern geometry

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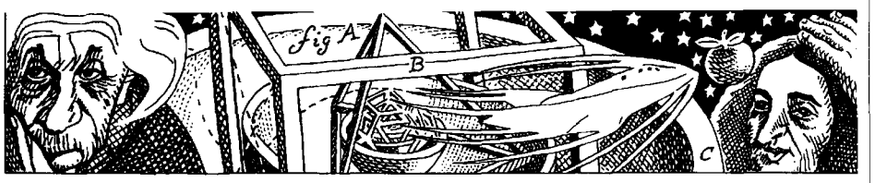

"Lost in space" seems to be this year's theme. **Pat Coyne** on the troubles of the space industry

The past few years have not been good for space enthusiasts. The well-publicised flaws in the mirror of the Hubble telescope, and the consequent and equally well-publicised flight of the shuttle Endeavour, and the attendant space walks in an effort to repair it, are only the latest in a long list of hitches that have put a massive question-mark over the future of Nasa, the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

To catalogue Nasa's problem missions would be to pry into highly public grief. A list, by no means exhaustive, would include:

- The complete loss of the Mars Observer probe in August this year. It failed to re-establish communication after what should have been a routine pressurising of fuel tanks. One speculation is that it blew itself apart, though it might, just conceivably, be even now silently orbiting Mars.
- The loss, in the same month, of the Landsat 6 remote-sensing satellite.
- The failure to deploy the main antenna of the Galileo Jupiter probe, with the result that information can only be dribbled back using a secondary antenna.
- The failure last year—which nearly led to a serious accident—to deploy an Italian tethered satellite from the shuttle Atlantis. The problem was caused by a bolt added just before launch.

Nor are the Hubble telescope's troubles confined to the embarrassing flaw in its mirror. Its designers failed to account for the thermal stress caused when the satellite moved out of the Earth's shadow into the full glare of sunlight. This caused the solar panels, which supply its electricity, to jitter, and made it very difficult to control the satellite accurately enough to take pictures of distant stars. Eventually, one of the panels buckled completely and had to be cut adrift in the repair mission.

Not surprisingly, Nasa has come in for considerable criticism, as well as for questioning over its future role—if any. Its flagship, the space station, has been whittled down, from a $30-billion rival to *Star Trek*'s Enterprise to an $11-billion flying can, probably dependent on Russian support. Hardly less surprising, but much less fairly, the whole idea of space science seems to be losing support, particularly in the US. That would be a pity. There is an enormous amount still to be done. More, good space science is every bit as exciting as some of the more dubious cosmic PR stunts of recent years. Take, for example, the Voyager missions to the outer planets—the first time Neptune and Uranus have been on the front pages since their discovery. Then, too, look at the hoopla over the Cosmic Background Explorer (Cobe) satellite, which recently discovered evidence of the earliest moments of the Big Bang.

The problems are mostly, if not entirely, institutional. Set up to run the Apollo moon landing programme—an unqualified triumph—Nasa is in danger, according to its critics, of bureaucratic parochialism. Scarcely smaller than it was at the height of the Apollo programme, Nasa has emphasised the politically visible manned missions at the the expense of the scientifically valuable unmanned. It has suffered accordingly from a combination of rising costs, its own errors and the (not unconnected) increasing disenchantment, especially in Congress, with space exploration. Not that Nasa's plight is unique. The European Space Agency, too, has put much of its efforts into a manned programme, the mini-shuttle Hermes—a case of reinventing a rather worse wheel—and has run into exactly the same funding and political morass.

The fixation on the space shuttle was, and not only with hindsight, a cardinal error. The extra non-useful payload—the crew—together with the extra safety and comfort features required by crewed flight, inevitably pushed up costs. This has been exacerbated by the much less frequent shuttle flights, little more than a tenth of the 50-60 flights a year originally envisaged. Unmanned launcher projects were abandoned, with the result that the Challenger disaster left most US space projects grounded for years. When they resumed, civilian projects were all but squeezed out. Large, commercial satellites can be launched by rival European, Russian or Chinese rockets, but there is little priority being given to new, cheaper launch methods for smaller, scientific missions. The innovatory McDonnell-Douglas DC-X, which aims to cut costs by putting payloads in orbit using a single-stage launcher, rather than the present, more expensive, multi-stage vehicles, has now fallen foul of Congress.

As a result, most scientists working in space-related fields can expect to participate in, at most, only one or two missions in a lifetime.The priority now must be to set new goals for space research—principally the development of low-cost launchers and the establishment of clear, scientifically valid objectives. With US, European and Russian space science programmes all at the crossroads, there could not be a better moment.

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Sebastião Salgado's epic photographs of humankind at work have prompted accusations of exploitation. **Amanda Hopkinson** profiles and defends him

Saint Sebastião, martyr

A century's end is a time of apocalyptic visions. A hundred years ago, a backward look spelt nostalgia and romance; a forward look nihilism and anarchy. At the end of a millennium, we are again evaluating our past and visualising our future. Philosophy appears as bankrupt as religion, but artists are treated as seers. So one who can realise the vision of a majestic and horrific world, and philosophise lucidly about it, will provoke both enormous admiration and enormous criticism.

Sebastião Salgado has been a photographer for 20 years. Before that, he was an economist for the International Coffee Organisation, coffee being a principal export of his native Brazil. Born on a cattle farm in Aimoraes, he grew up in a household that combined an emphasis on formal education with a fair bit of life in the saddle, riding the herds to market and catching the train back home. It was on one such train journey that Salgado saw the giant steel furnaces flaring in the night sky and visualised them as "cathedrals, attended by high priests in strange vestments".

In his mid-teens, Salgado was sent to Santa Victoria on the coast to study for university entrance under the Salesian fathers. There he would go down to the sea-front and watch the vast cargo ships load with the "three C's": coffee, cane and cocoa. He also fantasised about the foreign countries the ships visited, his appetite already whetted by the tales of his parents, second-generation immigrants from eastern and southern Europe.

Given Salgado's firm belief that "really, life is so short, and in it we change so little, so very little" and that "we really only have one tale to tell, it's the way we tell it that alters," we have his word for the formative importance of early experiences. Ask what he feels he has retained and he mentions two things, one uncontrollably vast and one very specific: the horizons of his home state of Minas Gerais, and his collection of knives. Like his fellow Magnum photographer, Cartier-Bresson, he always carries his Leica and a knife with him. In his kitchen, he opens a drawer and produces a selection worthy of any hide-curing cowboy, one of which he expertly applies to skinning a *jamon serrano* for lunch.

It is tantalisingly simple to read history backwards, even more so when the work and the life so neatly dovetail. And the sprawling project of *Workers* validates some of Salgado's most fundamental beliefs. One is that "work is as important a human activity as most of the others we take for granted; there is a fundamental human need to work". From it flows the importance of job satisfaction, as opposed to mere remuneration, in one's work.

Salgado shifted to photography after a trip to Africa. He holds vehement views on how we need to learn from each other about the need for global change: "My 'social pictures' simply show what's going on around the world . . . The only way we can find a solution is if together we identify the problems." He retains an analytic method of problem-solving, informed by a Marxist understanding of the international labour market.

And he has an impressive ability to organise his time. "I only came to photography shortly before turning 30. If each project takes me around seven or eight years, that means maybe half-a-dozen major undertakings." He increasingly shares the workload with his wife, Lélia. Trained as an architect and with experience in running photo galleries, she takes on the planning of every exhibition, meticulously fitting the 280 prints of *Workers* into the groundplans of museums across the world. She provided the maquettes for the 400-page book of *Workers* and suggests layouts for newspapers and magazines.

For Salgado, time is always pressing at his heels. He hankers to be back taking photographs; by the time one show is on the walls, he is deeply involved in the next, currently on the theme of migration. "On the one hand, we have the collapse of frontiers, an end to the division of the world into east and west. On the other, barriers are going up to attempt to stem the colossal flow of populations moving from east to west, south to north." The latter distinction is one Salgado identifies with: "I come from the south, and I photograph in that way we have to see the world . . . Sometimes the person from the south side of the world

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wonders why you in the north should think you own the property of beauty, of dignity, of riches." He feels that this unconscious equation of goodness with wealth, badness with poverty, conditions much criticism of him.

Paradoxically, it is those who accuse him of exploiting the suffering of the hungry who accept the promotion of anorexic models as icons of cat-walk beauty. And "icon" is precisely the word most often used against him. His image of the canecutter with his machete as a "warrior" or the firefighter struggling with spouting oil wells as a "hero" is confused with the man himself, soon declared to be possessed only of feet of clay. For where there are icons, there follow the iconoclasts.

Back-lit and starkly black-and-white, his work lends itself to technical discussions on the evolution of social documentary. It also addresses the role of the proletariat in a world rapidly moving from an industrial to a technological age. With two-thirds of the working population still in the former, Salgado is enthusiastic about the discussions his work may generate. He is less pleased when the deconstruction of the image turns into an effort to dethrone the idol he never wished to become.

In a piece called "Good Intentions" in the *New Yorker*, Ingrid Sischy claimed to dispel "the overall confusion in Salgado's work between what is actually present and what he intends". Good intentions, we all know, pave the way only to hell; even so, this is heavy stuff, begging the question of any picture's capacity to signify simply one thing.

It is precisely the assumption that an image can bear only one reading, and that it is the west's (or the north's) right to determine it, that infuriates Salgado. We are so convinced that we have the monopoly not only of beauty but of its *definition*, he insists, that we fail to recognise it where it is plain to someone with different values. "Of course my pictures . . . show a lot of distress. But they also show a lot of dignity . . . and it's you who do not—or do not want to—see beyond the distress."

Salgado must be among the hardest journalists to fault on the way he goes about his work. He shares the lives of his subjects in the mining villages of India or the plantations of Latin America for days or weeks before he picks up a camera, and for weeks or months until he is satisfied. Yet the personal nature of so much criticism, directed less at the photographs than at the man and his supposed "bad faith", has an altogether more moralistic ring.

Perhaps it is not Salgado's good intentions but ours that are at fault. Perhaps too little has changed in a western imperialism that is as much cultural as economic. If we believe we are seeing serried ranks of slaves clambering the laddered sides of the Serra Pelada gold mines in Salgado's famous pictures, that is a consequence of the western financial markets. They dictate that gold should be so dear and labour so cheap. If the oncoming millennium brings us visions of apocalypse now, then they show a hell of our own devising.

"Workers" is at the Royal Festival Hall, 14 December to 14 February; an "Omnibus" about Salgado is on BBC1, 14 December

Paul Stump argues that alternative comedy has to grow up to get to America

Unfunny business

Janet Street Porter's celebrated description of alternative comedy as "the new pop" will be given added resonance by two television programmes next week. Sunday sees the live ITV broadcast of the grandly titled *British Comedy Awards* ceremony. The pop analogy will be taken to its limit the following day, when BBC2 broadcasts a documentary on the *Live and in Pieces* theatre tour undertaken this autumn by the comic double act Newman and Baddiel. The tour climaxes, somewhat inevitably, with a gig today (10 December) at the very rock'n'roll Wembley Arena.

The success of Newman and Baddiel is perhaps the most eloquent testimony to the fact that Britain has become a society where laughter means loot. Newman and Baddiel publicity is everywhere; teen magazine covers carry their pictures; kids who not so long ago were chanting the Shamen's "eezer good, he's Ebeneezer Goode" are now intoning Newman and Baddiel's *History Today* sketches. Who needs singalong choruses when you've got parrot-along punchlines?

But can alternative comedy and its stars maintain this triumphal progress through popular culture? Is the Altcom audience in danger of laughing itself to death?

Certainly, Altcom's biggest selling point, its iconoclasm, is in danger of becoming obsolete. In its infancy, Altcom won friends by aggressively favouring new, contemporary comic targets over the cheapshot stereotypes central to the practice of much "establishment" British comedy. It also kicked against what it perceived to be the self-satisfaction and ossification of that genre and its practitioners. But the explicit political awareness of class, race, sexuality and prejudice that made early Altcom so distinctive and attractive has gone. Ben Elton seems positively vehement in his attempts to distance himself from his old ultra-political stage persona. Many newer acts, like Newman and Baddiel, are determinedly apolitical in tone.

But Altcom appears not only to be building its own new comic orthodoxy, but its own new comedy oligarchy as well. The *Awards* for instance, will be staffed with all-too-familiar names; Ross, Rhys-Jones, Elton and Henry will all doubtless feature somewhere. More important, the media muscle power and financial clout of this new elite dwarfs that of the masonry of old-style comedians whom Altcom once purported to despise. Armed with the resources of the modern media machine, the Altcom Establishment potentially possesses much greater influence than the Tarbie-Brucie "mother-in-law-gag mafia" they have supplanted.

The current buoyancy of the comedy market should, ideally, militate against the foundation of a new establishment. It should maintain the upward mobility of the market-leaders and ensure that this continues to attract a constant supply of new talent. But, as with most markets, the reality isn't quite bearing out the theory.

For starters, TV—chief catalyst of the comedy boom and the launchpad for all its most successful careers—can't possibly support much more Altcom in its schedules. It can only be a matter of time before the "house full" signs go up. And for all the fine talk about multiple-choice TV and an explosion of new channels, few if any of these arrivistes are likely to able to pay the sort of star wages that comedy's success has granted its most successful exponents. There's a very real prospect that, quite soon, too many comedians will be fighting over too little airtime; the new, inexperienced artists needed to maintain comedy's momentum will come off worst. Up-and-coming club acts such as Nick Wilty, Mandy Knight, Ronnie Ancona and Simon Bligh (a random four from many) could be denied deserved exposure by the louder claims of more seasoned performers.

Surely, though, the current crop of comic grandees won't be monopolising our screens forever. Won't they be moving up to bigger and better things? America, for example? Possibly not. For while Britain has fallen prostrate before Altcom, the US has remained stonily unmoved. Where Sellers, Python and Billy Connolly succeeded, their comic heirs have failed, the Hollywood excursions of Rik Mayall and Lenny Henry being particularly ignominious flops. Others, like Rowan Atkinson, don't appear to have got even that far.

This US embargo is perhaps the single most important cause of overload in the Altcom market. It has saddled British comedy with a logjam of stymied careers and, by extension, the comedy saturation that we now behold. Comics who seem as yet unable to acquire Green Cards into America's comedy elite turn for solace to the friendlier British market where there are still highly remunerative opportunities: the burgeoning advertising careers of Atkinson, Mayall, Smith and Jones *et al* bear witness to this.

Next week's self-congratulatory TV beanos are the last thing that British comedy needs. If the genre's overblown inertia is to be tackled, such fatuous gestures of opulence should be avoided. For the sake of their integrity and their audiences, Altcom's elite must stop flaunting their own success so visibly.

Comedians need to disengage themselves from their cosily lucrative loop of undergraduate humour and focus on the grown-up comedy Eldorado of America. If they do not, they risk transforming themselves from the new pop stars into the new stadium rockers, long outliving their usefulness as entertainers, and with their creativity addled by wealth and complacency.

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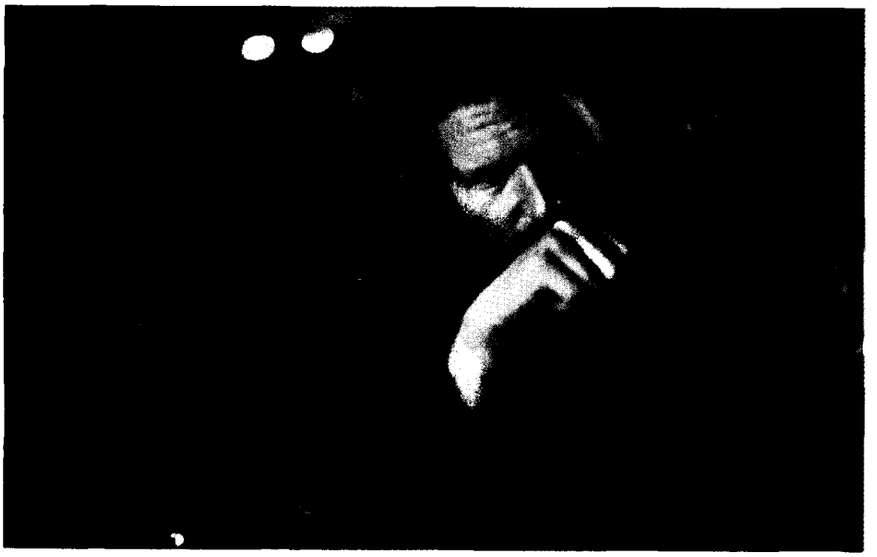

Jonathan Romney enjoys a trip into middle America's quiet desperation

Shiftless in Seattle

American Heart is what you might call a minor film. That's not to say it's not a good one, although it's by no means a show-stopper. But it does something quite rare. It takes you somewhere—nowhere extraordinary, admittedly—and lets you live there for 114 minutes.

All this might sound like some extreme exercise in damning with faint praise, but there's nothing wrong with a film being minor in the way this one is—that is, resolutely in a minor key. It doesn't set out to win your affections. Like its characters, the waifs and strays of Seattle, it sort of hangs around and asserts a sullen presence. Despite its subject matter, which you might expect to lend itself to a rhetoric of tears and inflated pathos, it doesn't make any gestures; it just shrugs its way into your attention.

We're used to hearing about mainstream films that purportedly deal with the Dark Underbelly of America, but that usually means the Lynch approach of depicting glossy banality with a Gothic undertow—severed ears, weirdly coiffured fat people and weird sex behind the mall. What never gets talked about—except perhaps in documentaries, and *American Heart* (on release from 10 December) is the work of a documentarist—is the real underbelly of poverty and inner-city inertia. There's nothing remotely glamorous about it, and you'd be hard pressed to pitch that topic to a studio in 25 words. So *American Heart* is really out there on its own.

Just a regular guy: the self-effacing and unfussy Jeff Bridges

As dispassionate accounts of life's downside go, *American Heart* isn't quite Bresson, more your bog-standard dirty realism. But it's admirable for taking such a low-pitched approach while still observing rather strait-laced narrative and stylistic conventions. It seems flat, both visually and in its pacing, but that's part of the technique by which director Martin Bell consistently desensationalises his material. Despite its subject matter—the slow tentative reconciliation of an ex-con and his young son—the film doesn't bother trying to tear-jerk you until the end, and that, one suspects, is purely as a sop to ensure the production dollar. There's a matter-of-fact feel about the film that matches its characters' attitudes, a scene-by-scene impression of aimlessness that matches their day by day living. This is *Shiftless in Seattle*.

Martin Bell, the director, is a BBC alumnus who a few years ago made *Streetwise*, a documentary about Seattle's street children: hustlers, prostitutes, junkies and feckless dreamers. Here, he and writer Peter Silverman pick up that story and widen its scope. The focus is on one boy who's going the way of the *Streetwise* kids, and his father Jack (Jeff Bridges), a just-released jailbird who's determined to go straight, more out of fatigue than any other reason. When Jack hits Seattle, his young son Nick (Edward Furlong) is there tailing him like an unshakeable conscience. Jack's more concerned to meet up with Charlotte (Lucinda Jenney in one of those tender-tough roles that Ellen Barkin eats up), a taxi driver who's been sending him passionate letters c/o *American Heart*, a pen-pal magazine for prisoners. It's one of the film's merits that it brings Jack, Nick and Charlotte together without ever opting for the nuclear-family triangle that would wring dead-cert sobs. They may get together for an in-car barbecue, but this is real life (or a convincing impression), so don't expect happy endings.

Nick, meanwhile, ends up hanging out with the teenage hustlers and hookers downtown.

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There might seem to be some determinism at work—Jack's bravado means he can't resist tipping Nick off about the criminal life, even when he's trying to deter him. But the film argues against such easy connections. Nick struggles all the way against his "inevitable" fate, even when it's clearly the only thing that's going to get him out of a dead end, and it'll leave him as washed out as his dad.

Bells avoids the easy option of milking one dramatic focus. As one of the film's producers, Jeff Bridges could have chosen to walk away with the meat of it, but he doesn't. Instead, he plays Jack weary and sluggish, amiable but terminally undignified. It's a superbly unfussy performance—is he the only Hollywood star who knows how to be self-effacing when the occasion demands? He's beautifully partnered by Furlong, from *Terminator 2*, whose abrasive edge, matched by an androgynous blankness, sets Nick up as a *tabula rasa* just waiting to have pragmatic cynicism etched all over it.

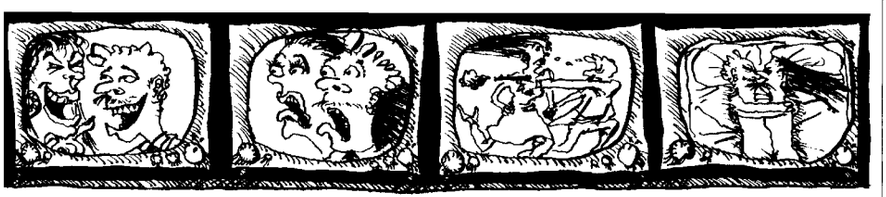
But beside the lead pair, other characters get their incidental look-in. There's a wonderful telling touch, when the kids go down to the strip joint where one girl's mother gyrates day long in a peepshow box. One girl, who so far seems more asexual than butch, slips into a separate booth and watches the strippers with barely concealed desire as the teasing shutters descend slowly, craning her neck to catch every last second. Bell gives you the girl's whole story in a shot. We immediately know everything about her sexuality, maybe more than she quite knows yet; but we also know that the life she leads means that her sexuality is never going to be quite her own to enjoy. You can imagine how another film might have played the character as a cheap running joke, but just the fact that she's allowed to come into focus for this throwaway second is a too-rare gesture of generosity.

The fact that much of the film has the flat, matter-of-fact look of a TV movie is an advantage. The Kelsons' cheap room isn't hopelessly squalid—just dreary, empty, liveable—but not Home, whatever that is. The fact that it's so anonymous, so no-place-in-particular, immediately makes you at ease with the daily banality of the Kelsons' life. The horror of it isn't screaming degradation—just that it's nothing special and getting less special every day.

Bell goes for only one rhetorical touch, and it's not too obtrusive—the black-and-white inserts of Nick in a snowbound reform school. A brief freeze-frame near the end suggests overtones of *Les 400 Coups*, and maybe, in the style of Truffaut's hero Antoine Doinel, there's scope to follow up the next phase of Nick's chilly career; for once, a sequel might not be a bad thing.

American Heart is enough out of its time to demand attention. It reminds you of the 1970s, when independent American cinema managed to deal with unglamorous topics and still have sweep, and didn't have to sell its conceits quite as whimsically as it does now. It's an adventurous but completely marginal film, which is why you'd do well to see it. Like Jack, they're an endangered breed.

JACI STEPHEN



In Greenland, the deep throats are clamming up. Will the mysterious mogul ever break his cover?

The government's lifting of restrictions on takeovers among the ITV companies has given way to widespread paranoia in the industry. Everyone likes power, but only in their own hands. As soon as one individual starts to acquire more than is deemed morally acceptable, fear sours the taste of ambition.

No media mogul currently attracts more fear than Carlton Communications' chairman, Michael Green. Now that Carlton has made a bid for Central Television, there are demands for the control of Green's vast empire. Recently named the 277th wealthiest person in the British Isles (£44.75 million), the man naturally attracts envy, but there is something almost humorous about the very real terror he strikes in the hearts of his peers.

I was recently asked by a newspaper to write a profile of Green. There have been many; all the same. Green has an aversion to publicity that verges on the pathological, and the people around him who will go on record only speak well of him. Those who speak off the record never make it into print.

Michael Green is a tough man not to interview, and my own attempt to write a profile ended up the same blind alley. It was, however, revealing about the industry's relationship to Green and the hate that dare not speak its name.

At first, the quest boded well, and I set off in search of the people known to be at the heart of the Green Party. I caught Channel 4 boss Michael Grade, whom I knew to be a good friend of his, at Heathrow. "Of course I'll talk to you, " he said. "Have you spoken to Him?" Like many before me, the answer had to be no. Michael winked and nodded. "I'll speak to him." It was a good start. Encouraged, I moved on to the next stop, who was BBC1 Controller Alan Yentob, also a good friend of Him. "Have you spoken to Michael?"

"Yes, he said he'll talk."

"He'll give you an interview?"

"No, I meant Grade, not Green."

"Ah. Well . . . " Yentob's eyes now seemed to spin round the back of his head, surveying the room before committing himself to anything that could be construed as disloyalty to Michael (Green, not Grade). "Well . . . if Michael is talking to you" (Grade, not Green), "I will too. Are you going to speak to Him?"

"He won't talk."

"I'll speak to Michael".

"Grade?"

"Green, I'll talk to you once you've spoken to Michael."

"Grade?"

"Yes."

Next stop was a Soho cafe. My contact appared to have grown his hair over his face, but I soon realised he was merely looking over his shoulder. The hair sat down and a voice emanated from somewhere at the back of the head that was really the front. "His sex life has been quite interesting." Unfortunately, a large lorry started to unload outside and my tape failed to record a word. "Are you going to destroy the tape?" whispered The Contact, his hands trembling.

Everywhere I turned for information about Michael Green, one cry kept repeating itself: "You must talk to Bob." Bob Phillis, that is, who worked with Green on Carlton's franchise bid for Thames until they fell out.

"Bob, I've heard you can tell me a lot about Michael Green."

"The Controller of Radio 4?" Bob shifted nervously, avoiding my eyes. His thick hair, normally a scene of perfect waves framing a shining, baby face, quivered.

"Carlton."

Bob lowered his voice. The hair regained its composure. "Is He talking?"

"Michael Grade is going to try and persuade Him."

"Michael won't."

"Grade?"

"Green."

Bob turned away, smiling. Bob is smiling a lot these days. In fact, Bob enters a room at least a minute and a half after his smile. Everyone suspects Bob is auditioning for the Director-General's job. He can't talk for too long on any one subject because he would have to stop smiling.

Trying to find anyone who will talk about Michael Green is like rounding up witnesses to testify against the Mafia. People who refused to talk themselves sidled up to me in bars, whispering. "I've got a few more names for you." Many of these were from Thames, which lost the franchise to Carlton. "I'm fed up with giving stuff to the press about him, because they never print it," said one.

Green did, in fact, telephone me in answer to my fax, explaining why he never gave interviews. Begging, pleading, assuring him how good he would look on the cover of a magazine—it all ended in failure. "Alright, just tell me one thing," I asked. "Are you any good in bed?" He laughed. "No comment, either on or off the record." At £44.75 million and rising fast, who cares.

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Left in the lurch

THE BRITISH NEW LEFT
Lin Chun
Edinburgh University Press, £30
ARGUING REVOLUTION: THE INTELLECTUAL LEFT IN POSTWAR FRANCE
Sunil Khilnani
Yale University Press, £19.95

Peter Scott

Well into the 1960s the British left seemed to be stuck in the slough of intellectual despond. Philosophy remained dominated by empiricists or logical positivists; a creative Marxist culture had never taken root in the land of his long exile. Literature was contested between the Bloomsburyites, who occupied the literary pages, and Leavisites, who occupied the English departments. Sociology barely existed; the LSE and Nuffield colonisers had only begun to spread across the face of higher education. Cultural studies had not really been invented, despite the cathartic publication of *The Uses of Literacy* in 1954. History remained in a pre-social phase, although old-guard Marxists had attempted stodgily to occupy the terrain of economic history. So the insular litany continued.

In France, the situation was very different. The quarter-century from 1944 to 1968 saw the triumph of the intellectual left. The rupture of Vichy had deprived the Catholic right, so strong through the 19th century, of its intellectual legitimacy; in any case the postwar Gaullists eschewed intellectualism. The totemic intellectual was Sartre, but in disciplines other than philosophy a milder and more eclectic leftism held sway. In history, for example, Fernand Braudel, as different from Sartre as it was possible to be, and the *Annales* school dominated—although never domineered—setting social and anthropological directions that have endured.

In the later 1960s, things got a little better for the intellectual left in Britain and a lot better in France. The "old" new left of Edward Thompson and Raymond Williams Mark I (of *Culture and Society*) and the "new" new left of Perry Anderson and, arguably, of Williams Mark II (cultural materialism and all that), despite their deep differences, produced, for the first time in Britain since the early years of the 20th century, an argued and, on the whole, humane response to the changing configurations of capitalism. They provided intellectual categories that the English were able to use in order to reflect intelligently on their past—and so their future.

In France, Althusser succeeded Sartre as the icon of the intellectual left. His theorised, disengaged discourse paradoxically acquired a charisma in the years around, and just after, 1968 that outshone the influence enjoyed by Sartre's normative and committed intellectual politics of a decade earlier. Next came

Jean-Paul Sartre at the Renault Factory, Billancourt in 1968

Foucault's playful inversion of conventional categories like crime, sexuality, power and knowledge. The rise of the intellectual left seemed unstoppable, although keen-witted observers noticed it was becoming progressively more "intellectual" and less "left".

Then, just when its influence reached what seemed an irreversible climax, the intellectual left in France faced a powerful revisionist challenge. By 1983, Perry Anderson was able to write with no more than his customary hyperbole: "Paris is today the capital of European intellectual reaction", an intriguing account of a France that only two years before had elected a socialist president. This "reaction" gathered force in the years leading up to the bicentenary of the French Revolution. The left's conventional interpretation of that event, an eruption of social conflict that foreshadowed the later Russian Revolution, was challenged by a new interpretation of the revolution as a shift in political language. This new interpretation, associated above all with François Furet, reflected the post-1968 enthusiasm for discourse and narrative, as well as endorsing a much older liberal-democratic emphasis on the rights of man.

Meanwhile in Britain, which after sustaining a weak minority Labour government turned sharply to the right at the 1979 elections, leftist orthodoxies were established in many disciplines, even if they lacked the theoretical rigour demanded by an Althusser (or an Anderson?). An intriguing flip-over seemed to have taken place. Both France and Britain abandoned their exceptionalisms—but with contrary results. France, the land of Sartre and Foucault, went "right" intellectually, although "left" politically, while Britain (or, at any rate, England), the land of pragmatism or even philistinism, discovered the delights of intellectualism, predominantly leftist at first but more recently neoconservative.

These two books are important contributions to understanding this flip-over. Chun's is an impressive account of the British new left. It will become the standard work on a movement, the demise of which she intriguingly dates to 1977, two years before Margaret Thatcher's first victory. She offers a coherent and comprehensive account—at times too comprehensive perhaps; the net of the new left is very widely drawn. The "culturalism" of Richard Hoggart and early Williams was succeeded by a more robust but still-romantic political engagement in the 1960s, and then by the slide into theory typical of the 1970s. It is also a non-partisan account. Her description of the fierce and famous controversy between E P Thompson and Perry Anderson is even-handed. Above all, hers is an affectionate account, although it does not neglect the new left's weaknesses—its comparative neglect of economics and science, for example.

Khilnani's greatest strength is his skilful combination of philosophical and historical perspectives to produce an impressively integrated account of the postwar intellectual left in France. But, although Sartre and Althusser are treated with scrupulous scholarship, Furet and other revisionists are the heroes of *Arguing Revolution*. Khilnani sees the decline of the intellectual left as producing a more moderate politics in France, closer to the liberal-democratic practice of Britain and the US (or the apolitical "expert" culture of the European Union?). The narrative of revolution has been rewritten, creating a civil society rather than establishing a totalising Jacobin state.

The conventional account of the consequences of the new left in Britain is kind to its reputation. The new left of the 1960s and 1970s is seen as laying the foundations of the new movements of the 1980s and 1990s, organised around issues such as gender and the environment. The decline and fall of the French intellectual left, in contrast, are regarded—and not only by Perry Anderson—as opening the way to right-wing reaction. A careful reading of both these books casts doubts on this dichotomy and tends to support

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another interpretation, less complacent in British terms.

Both the new left in Britain and the post-1968 intellectual left in France were fiercely critical of established institutions and patterns of thought. In France, the twin targets were the Gaullist state, with its many neo-Jacobin features, and the Communist Party. The beneficiaries, therefore, were moderates on right and left. Khilnani even writes of a struggle to talk the language of social democracy, a movement previously stigmatised because it did not conform to revolutionary myth.

In Britain, the target of this anti-institutional critique was the postwar welfare state, the very liberal democratic practice to which France, in Khilnani's view, has belatedly conformed. The beneficiary, accordingly, was not the new left itself, because it never bothered to nurture alternative institutional frameworks, nor a Bennite Labour Party with its half-digested theory, but the new right and, however, paradoxically, the (neo-Jacobin?) Thatcherite state. It is the new right that has exploited the anti-statist, even deconstructive, discourse of the new left to pursue a contrary agenda.

Peter Scott is professor of education at the University of Leeds. He is the author of "The Crisis of the University" and "Knowledge and Nation"

Invisible man

THE FUTURE LASTS A LONG TIME
Louis Althusser, translated by Richard Veasey
Chatto & Windus, £17.99

Martin Bright

When the French Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser, wrote his autobiography in 1985, he knew that it would not be published in his lifetime. Five years earlier, he had strangled his wife Hélène during a severe bout of depression. His state of mind at the time meant that he was never tried for the murder. Instead he was granted a *non-lieu*, a special dispensation for someone who is deemed unfit to stand trial. In return, all his civil liberties were removed.

So for ten years Althusser lived in total obscurity, mostly in the Sainte-Anne psychiatric hospital in Paris, unable to sign his own name on official documents and forbidden from publishing any of his writings. To all intents and purposes, Althusser ceased to exist after the murder, though in fact he did not die until 1990.

Perhaps this sounds like a good deal. But as Althusser points out at the beginning of *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, he did not even have the basic rights of a "normal" criminal. He was not allowed to repay his debt to society by serving a prison sentence, and until the publication of this book he was not even permitted to answer for his crime.

Individual identity in the public arena is somewhat less developed in Britain than it is in France. Recent resistance to John Major's identity card proposals and, before that, people's readiness to disappear from the electoral roll rather than pay the poll tax would seem to show that we rather like it that way. In France, where one's identity as a rational, responsible citizen is carefully controlled and monitored, what you *are* is fixed from a very early age by a rigid education system and a blithely interventionist state.

This proved to be a problem for Louis Althusser, whose sense of his own identity was pretty frail from the outset. He was named Louis after his uncle, a dashing airman who had been his mother's sweetheart before he was killed in the first world war. When people said his name, the effeminate young Althusser often imagined they were saying "lui" (him—referring to the uncle) and that he, the younger Louis, was invisible.

Even when Althusser became one of the most respected *maitres à penser* of French intellectual life, he was still haunted by the feeling that he was living in a void: "Since I did not really exist, I was simply a creature of artifice, a non-being, a dead person who could only love and be loved by means

Heseltine, Michael *See* TARZAN.

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CASSELL

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of artifice and deception."

In his autobiography, Althusser tries to come clean about this artifice and deception. He admits vast gaps in his reading: he knew nothing about Aristotle or Kant, had read only a little Hegel. He even says that he had only studied a few passages of Marx in detail. He also confesses that he invented quotations to score philosophical points.

At no point, however, does Althusser suggest that this duplicity undermined the concept at the heart of his work—that the ideological machinery of the modern state (the family, the church, the education system, political parties *et al*) encourages in us the acceptance of our own oppression. But then Althusser himself was the living proof. In *The Future Lasts a Long Time*, we see him being eaten up and spat out by each of the Ideological State Apparatuses, as he liked to call them.

Worst of all for Althusser was the family, "that most frightful and appalling and horrifying of the the Ideological State Apparatuses". And it is when he writes about his dreadful upbringing that he is at his most passionate. In one passage where he tells of how his parents refused to let him play with other children, his fury is uncontainable: "They did it in order to instill in me as a small child the supreme values prevailing in the society in which I was growing up: absolute respect for authority and above all for the state, which since Marx and Lenin we have come to recognise, thank God, as a terrible 'machine'."

Much has been made of Althusser's madness and badness in relation to his politics. It was, to say the least, unfortunate for the European left that the most prominent modern reinterpreter of Marx turned out to be a deluded wife-killer. In the present political atmosphere it is hard to imagine the excitement that was once generated by books with titles such as *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*. But if Althusser could rework Marx's ideas for a whole generation in the 1960s, it was because he felt their truth so deeply in his own life.

Freud squad

FREUD, RACE AND GENDER
Sander L Gilman
Princeton University Press, £19.95
THE CASE OF SIGMUND FREUD: MEDICINE AND IDENTITY AT THE FIN DE SIECLE
Sander L Gilman
Johns Hopkins University Press, £26.50

David Herman

When Laurence Olivier first discussed playing Shylock in Jonathan Miller's television production of *The Merchant of Venice*, Miller was struck by the grotesque make-up Olivier wanted in order to look "authentic". Interestingly, Olivier's idea of authenticity was to ape the worst excesses of age-old anti-Semitic stereotypes. Similarly, when Alec Guinness wanted to play the part of Fagin in David Lean's film of *Oliver Twist*, he set out to impress Lean with appropriate make-up, costume and voice. Even admirers of Guinness's famous portrayal would agree that his Fagin out-caricatured Dickens. The question of what Jewishness *looks like* lies at the centre of Sander L Gilman's fascinating books.

During the late 19th century and early 20th century, western Jews were assimilated and became more and more "invisible". Educated, professional Jews like Freud dressed and spoke just like their non-Jewish neighbours and colleagues. They became indistinguishable. For racists obsessed with racial difference this was intolerable: the Jew had to be different and had to look different. But if the Jewish lawyers, doctors and academics of *fin-de-siècle* central Europe did not look like Olivier's Shylock or Guinness's Fagin, wherein lay their difference, their Jewishness?

These questions are meat and drink to Gilman, one of the most original and stimulating cultural historians of his generation. Gilman's subject is—to quote the fashionable jargon of the day—the construction of difference. In numerous books over the past 20 years, he has traced stereotypes of sexuality, race and madness in European culture. Gilman is soaked in the cultural history of German-speaking central Europe, of anti-Semitism and of madness and psychiatry. His subject is our fascination with stereotypes, with "seeing" the categories that obsess us.

His masterpiece, *Seeing the Insane*, is a history of the iconography of madness from medieval Fools to Van Gogh and Freud. The book shows how, during the long centuries when we could not explain or cure madness, our artists and mad-doctors were tireless in their attempts to draw the face of madness, to make visible what was invisible, and so to make comprehensive what they could not understand. If the mad were mad, their madness must be visible, seen in their gestures, their clothes, their bodies and faces (in the case of phrenology, in their skulls). The mad looked mad. You could *see* their madness.

There are obvious comparisons with Foucault. Both are fascinated by how European culture "sees the other", how intellectual discourses create ways of talking about madmen, Jews and homosexuals that catch their elusive objects in huge spotlights of learning. This preoccupation with the outsider leads Gilman—like Foucault—to the great spiders' webs of 19th-century knowledge: medicine and psychiatry. Both are fascinated by the ability of doctors and psychiatrists to weave huge webs of definitions and labels in which they caught the outsiders and deviants of modern Europe.

Gilman's new books develop ideas from his earlier work and focus on Freud's Vienna and how late 19th-century medical and scientific literature discussed Jews: clichés about Freud the Jewish patriarch or the "godless Jew" give way to a fascinating new landscape of scientific writing about Jewish anatomy and disease—especially syphilis, but also the strange obsession with circumcision—and Jews and madness.

In these two overlapping books, Gilman looks at Freud's work as a response to these 19th-century debates about the body and psyche of the Jew, and the diseases associated with Jews by a medical science steeped in theories of race. He explores "how 'race' and 'gender' were linked in the medical culture of Freud's time and in his responses to that culture". What emerges is an original picture of Freud, set in a scientific culture barely recognisable from previous accounts. Gilman thinks about race historically and asks stimulating questions about the difficulty of seeing ourselves outside the dominant cultural ways of seeing. It is a rich—sometimes over-rich—account that reminds us that the best cultural history does not bring us comfortingly nearer to the past, but brings its distance from us to life.

Recent South African writing

A new future

Lawrence Joffe

Last month, Cape Town's parliament ended three centuries of white minority monopoly on power. As one journey ends, another begins—the creation of a "new South Africa". At this crucial juncture, **Breyten Breytenbach**, the "enfant terrible" of Afrikaner literature, recalls his own personal journey back to his native land this year.

Return to Paradise (Faber & Faber, £17.50) deflates much of the euphoria. He begins with the flight back to the land that exiled and imprisoned him, and which now welcomes him back as a Prodigal Son. As his eye traces Africa's coastline, his mind dredges up memories. Soon we are in a dreamworld, a poetic maze of anthropomorphic invention where fishes sing and mirrors look back at you with someone else's face.

Breytenbach's frenetic three-month stay led to this alternately affectionate and decrying portrait of exhilarating sights, eccentric dreamers, displaced communities and bizarre racial myths. *Return* is the third book in a series after *A Season in Paradise* and *True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*. Again, Breytenbach rages against a system, erected in his white name, that punished him, ruined so many lives and broke his father's health.

But there is another side, seeking reconciliation and absolution. Feelings of mortality form a *leitmotif* for broken dreams. The Paris-based rebel discovers how beguilingly easily he slips into his familiar Afrikaner roots, and strives to reconcile this with relationships formed in the rest of Africa.

Questions of identity pervade his book. Breytenbach calls himself "a warped thread in the complex cloth of a much larger tale". Initially ostracised for opposing apartheid and marrying the "non-white" Yolande (who,

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as his journey's soulmate, calms him whenever he becomes maudlin), now South Africa's "politically correct" mock his love for Afrikaans. At the language's monument, a symbol of monolithic authoritarianism, he encounters a madman tearing the wings off birds and recoils with horror at this mirror image of his own impotent rage.

Breytenbach strips away the political veneer to show a more enduring reality in the natural beauty and common people of Venda, the hybrid hotchpotch of Cape Town, and the hills around Kwazulu's killing fields. In 1987, Breytenbach instigated a meeting in Senegal between prominent Afrikaners and the banned ANC that set in train Mandela's release and the collapse of apartheid. Now, however, he fears those who are jostling for power in the post-apartheid state. Embracing "anarchy", he (perhaps churlishly) spurns whites who have turned from their evil ways. Is he just some spoilt dilettante, flattered by the attentions of powerful figures from Tripoli to Durban? How important are artistic gestures measured against issues of life and death? Contradictions abound, but what remains is an authentic voice of conscience.

By contrast, **Ronnie Kasrils** is a man of action. Self doubt is not his stock-in-trade. In *Armed and Dangerous: my undercover struggle against apartheid* (Heinemann, £6.99)—mischievously named after a newspaper headline about him—Kasrils spins an often fascinating tale of intrigue and undercover work as a communist and leader of Umkhonto weSiswe, the ANC armed wing.

Born to a middle-class Jewish family in Johannesburg, Kasrils leaves childhood rebellion to join the struggle after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. Passing lightly over one failed marriage, we are whisked to Durban where our hero remarries, and is soon fashioning bombs from condoms that sever the city's electricity supply. Then he dashes across the border to a new life as London coordinator of anti-apartheid guerrillas.

A master recruiter, planner and disguise artist, Kasrils gives rare insights into life in Angolan, Russian and East German training camps. Returning from exile in 1990, he finds he is still on the run. There is much humour—rockets on Hampstead Heath, clandestine appointments in Golders Green cafes, eating snake stew—but also sadness at the devastating losses caussed by Boss murder squads. Despite his sensitivity and bonhomie, Kasrils relishes his bogeyman image. But his explanations for fatal tactical errors and Marxist shortcomings, and denials of splits in the ANC, ring only half-true.

If Kasrils seldom felt regret, another charismatic revolutionary, Winnie Mandela, apparently never did. In *The Lady: the life and times of Winnie Mandela* (Jonathan Cape, £18.99), an illustrated unauthorised biography of Winnie, **Emma Gilbey** adopts a similarly cinematographic treatment.

The book opens with gruesome evidence from Winnie's trial for abducting the murdered 14-year-old Stompie Moeketsi, then proceeds with her story as a series of flashbacks. From the outset, we see two contrasting Winnies—a responsible woman who helps her family and fellow social workers, and a tyrant who brooks no opposition.

Which one would prevail? Like a defence counsel pleading mitigating circumstances, Gilbey shows how this rural African girl survived apartheid's ghettos, using her charm, beauty, courage and intelligence. Like many, she was banned, arrested, tortured and sent into rural exile for her beliefs.

But there was another side to the loyal defiant martyr; and by the 1980s, the international symbol of resistance had turned into a local warlord and political untouchable heading a gang of political fugitives, lost children and misfits, whom she apparently subjected to the same abuse that Pretoria used against her.

So what went wrong? Here, Gilbey fails us. While earlier chapters give an excellent psychological and social portrait of the woman behind the headlines, the trial section relays a depressing stream of facts instead of analysis. Winnie is now divorced, both literally and politically, from Nelson; and while Gilbey's book is gripping, it ultimately cannot explain how she still acts as such a potent voice for those who see ANC compromises as a sellout.

Like the protagonists in these books, South Africa itself has undergone an exile from the African continent. As it returns to start a new future, can it survive those same feelings of dislocation and anger at past injustices?

THE Sun
Sun news special
HERO OF REAL RED OCTOBER
EXCLUSIVE
Poll tax councillor admits to spending scandal
CHARLES: WHY I STICK TOOTH PASTE UP MY NOSE..
It stops snores, and so does an onion!

A "classic" headline from the Sun, found, not surprisingly, in "GOTCHA: classic headlines from the Sun", edited by John Essery, and published by Signet, £4.99. Here are all your old favourites: "WRIT HIT THE FAN", "STICK IT UP YOUR JUNTA", "IT'S PADDY PANTSDOWN", "UP YOURS DELORS", "ONE LAWSON FOR THE RICH", "FREDDIE STAR ATE MY HAMSTER" and "MAN WHO MADE LOVE TO A PAVEMENT". A Christmas present for your worst enemy

Solomon's wisdom

PIGS IN HEAVEN
Barbara Kingsolver
Faber & Faber, £14.99

Mary Scott

The pigs in question are stars. Six of them were bad Cherokee boys to whom their parents, to teach them a lesson, fed pig food. The children became pigs, then stars. The spirits anchored them in the sky, "to remind parents to love their kids, no matter what". The seventh star in the cluster is the mother who wouldn't let go.

It's a neat central image for a novel that reworks Solomon's judgment on two women who claim the same child.

Turtle is Cherokee. She has been abused by her uncle and is wont, when distressed, to lie speechless in a dry bathtub with a blanket over her. Taylor, her fiercely loving adoptive mother, is white. Taylor is fortunate in her own mother, the redoubtable Alice, raised on a hog farm and ex-wife of a man who is wedded to his TV. They are a family without men: a man, pronounces Alice, is "somebody who won't go out of his way for you".

Taylor's lover, gangly musician Jax, is not of this breed. The entire weight of his edgy intelligence is bent on Taylor. Dialogue between the two of them is shot through with the self-irony of a man who knows his woman is her *own* woman; and that his only sensible course is patience and restraint. It is also elliptical, wry, smart and very funny.

Turtle's quick eyesight leads to nationwide celebrity. She is spotted on TV and identified as Cherokee by chip-on-her-shoulder Indian lawyer Annawake Fourkiller. Annawake's efforts to return the child to the Nation prompt Taylor into flight; mother and child's odyssey across middle America in the company of a real-life bulimic Barbie doll is by turns glorious farce and—as Taylor loses both money and job—a tragedy of despair.

On the way, she learns the realities of mixed-race adoption; and her return to negotiate with Annawake becomes inevitable. Rather less inevitable is Alice's involvement with the Cherokees and the final, utterly whacky resolution of Turtle's custody by the Nation's council.

There are many small delights from a cast of alternately dippy and super smart people. Taylor plays rock music in her peach tree to frighten the birds; Jax dallies with a landlady who talks like a 19th-century romance; the town lunatic sticks empty bottles over the branches of a tree. The minor characters are as vivid and as numerous as the family of which everyone—Alice, Taylor, Turtle and Jax—eventually find themselves to be part.

In other hands, the heartwarmingly happy ending could have become sentimental tosh. But Kingsolver maintains throughout the delicate balance between irony and tenderness that makes this novel a real treat.

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Whitehouse inexperience

QUITE CONTRARY: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY
Mary Whitehouse
Sidgwick & Jackson, £14.99
VIOLENCE IN FACTUAL TELEVISION: ANNUAL REVIEW 1993
Andrea Millwood Hargrave
Broadcasting Standards Council, published by John Libbey & Co Ltd, £12.50

Patricia Holland

When Judge Morland blamed *Childs Play 3* for its murderous influence on the boys in the James Bulger case, the *Sun* urged its readers to burn their copy of the offending video. They should purge their homes of this evil, believing, as Mary Whitehouse has long asserted, that violent fantasies cause violent acts.

But when photo-journalist Chris Steele-Perkins took his video diary camera to Southern Sudan, he made the opposite demand. As he photographed the rotting body of a man, dead from the ravages of famine, he turned to his audience, safe in their sitting rooms: "I *want* you to see this. This is what *I* see. It's happening and I want *you* to see it too." In this view, comfortable domesticity should not be defended against horror—that would be hyprocrisy and narrowness of vision. Factual violence on television can lead to more understanding, which *prevents* violent acts. So run the contradictory mythologies of the image, as each new incident twists the debate. "How things do go in cycles," writes Mary Whitehouse in her autobiography, *Quite Contrary*.

In the Broadcasting Standards Council's 1993 Review, *Violence in Factual Television,* (available from the publisher), BBC foreign affairs editor John Simpson notes: "It seems strange the people who go to the cinema, perhaps with their 12- or 14-year-old children, specifically to watch simulated acts of sadistic violence . . . should have any objection to watching images of the real thing." He and his crew risked attack in the Beirut suburb of Chatila in 1982 when his cameraman took time to film the massacred bodies in a way that would reveal the atrocity without emphasising the distressing detail. "We've had instructions. People get upset," the cameraman had insisted.

It was Chris Steele-Perkins's emphatic refusal to respect that possible distress that brought in the complaints. His programme "was not just disgusting, but perverted", wrote one viewer. The video diary was personal, charged with emotion, utterly different from the restrained presentation of John Simpson's news items. New genres—reconstruction, "reality television", video diaries and the use of secret cameras among them—have presented the audience with a new task. They must decide whether a programme is indeed "factual", or to what extent the move from detached objectivity means that some programmes must be judged more in the manner of fiction.

The viewers who took part in the survey were anxious to distinguish between the reality of violence in the world and the various ways in which that violence was portrayed on television. Offered the chance to re-edit the material they were shown, they carefully marked out the boundaries of what, to them, was an acceptable representation of fact. They were worried by music that added fiction-like production values; a reporter's description of an ear being "torn off" in a fight was too graphic. The amateurish acting of *Crimewatch* was appropriate to its purpose, but a stylish reconstruction made by *World in Action*, using soft-focus, music and slow motion, was thought to be excessive. It could be that the currrent-affairs producers are shifting their parameters faster than their audience are prepared to follow them.

The viewing groups always wanted to know the purpose of a violent scene. When they felt that upsetting material was accurately presenting public events—as with news re-

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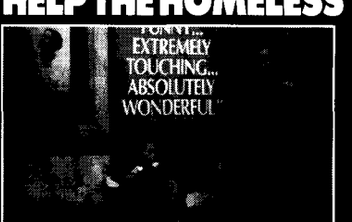

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BIG LIFE

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ports from Bosnia—even the most squeamish felt they had a "duty to watch". But they had strong reservations about programmes that "get you excited" in the manner of fiction. They found the American actuality programme *Cops*, disturbing, both because of the violence of its content—do the police *really* behave like that?—and because of the relish with which the camera dwelt on the action, which included a police dog sinking its teeth into a suspect's arm. In any case, the police were probably exaggerating their behaviour because the camera was there. The cops had watched *Cops*, too.

These fine discriminations—although certainly concerned with morality—are far removed from the stark division between good and evil that still characterises Mary Whitehouse's view of the world 30 years after the launch of her campaign. For her, the nature of television violence need not be explored, and a high body-count is itself an attack on family values. While her National Viewers' and Listeners' Association has certainly provided an outlet for genuine concern, given the opportunity, the ordinary members of the viewing panel came up with a far more thoughtful analysis. In the long run, they pointed out, it is the obsession with ratings that is edging British television ever closer to *Cops*.

FIRE alarm

THE ASSASSINATION OF NEW YORK
Robert Fitch
Verso, £19.95

Colin Ward

The acronym FIRE is the author's shorthand for the Finance, Insurance, and Real Estate elite that has, with public support, transformed New York from the richest city in the world to one of the poorest on the North American continent. It isn't a new story. Back in the 1960s, a series of books both here and there proclaimed that policies labelled "urban renewal" were a euphemism for "running the poor out of town", and that the real villains were not so much city planning departments, but the speculators in urban site values who manipulated them.

Fitch shows, with a wealth of detail more useful to American than to British readers, how the financial and real-estate elites have pushed up property values in New York City twentyfold by squeezing out small industry and the people employed in it from low-rent living and working space. It is thus a big transatlantic footnote to modest British studies such as *The Property Machine* by Peter Ambrose and Bob Colenutt (Penguin, 1975).

The trend they recorded 20 years ago reached its climax in the 1980s in the Docklands redevelopment, which eliminated blue-collar jobs on our doorstep as sites became more valuable than the firms they housed. In New York, this process killed off the garment trade and similar close-to-the-market, labour-intensive industries, so that the new class could work in gleaming offices or enjoy chic "loft living" in those solid old warehouses.

The further I got into this book the more I thought of the London parallels, often with the same teams of investors, developers and merchant banks involved. Personally, I rejoice that they've hit a bad patch. All is quiet at the moment on the front line, but the rich stay rich and blame their setbacks on the avarice of the poor.

Fitch argues that New York's decision-makers have to confront the problem that "a city with no production is not going to have as large a population as was formerly sustainable with production" and that "our elites are busy absorbing surplus rather than allowing it to be produced". The crunch comes with his presentation of current arguments from Bush/Clinton and Thatcher/Major governments.

"The problem of city government lies therefore in bringing the consumer-oriented, entrepreneurial, market-driven character of the private sector to government," he argues. "And of course as enthusiastic privatisers, they are for competition between public and private sectors to ensure cheaper, better services. What they fail to realise is that the paper entrepreneur in the urban private sector has created the need for a welfare state that is no longer supportable on the basis of a FIRE economy. The urban economy is increasingly incapable of throwing off enough surplus to maintain a decent public sector—much less the corrupt, slothful one we have."

He draws attention to the "unparalleled growth rates of stand-alone cities like Hong Kong and Singapore on the basis of productive labour and the almost equally stunning decline of New York on the basis of the surplus-sucking of the FIRE economy". Just as I would, he urges us to learn from cities that work.

Take Hong Kong, a thriving capitalist city where almost all the land is government owned so that leases yield a high revenue for health, education and housing. Or take cities such as Bologna in the region Fitch calls Italy's red belt, where "they funded workers' co-ops, they financed small business, and the region not only survived, but thrived. It became the most properous in Europe."

A few years ago, everyone was reading Tom Wolfe's novel *The Bonfire of the Vanities*. In the light of this book, which will have about a fraction of that readership, the underlying truths about the disaster that the finance, insurance and real-estate elite have brought to every city it has been able to dominate are endlessly revealed. If you look at the background of our own disreputable politicians and their investment holdings, you'll see why Fitch is right about London too.

Colin Ward's book "Welcome, Thinner City: urban survival in the 1990s" (1989) is still available from NCVO Publications

PRINTOUT

Last laughs

Boyd Tonkin

Anyone who has slogged their way through Freud's mortifying "Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious" will have learned one lesson. Never, ever try to explain a gag. What goes for the common crack applies in spades to satire, which hangs from its occasion like fruit on a tree. Cut it away from topical allusions, and it rots fast. Rory Bremner, whose Channel 4 show is now the nearest TV comes to political wit, had a sketch last week that mapped Ken Clarke's out-of-character skinflint Budget on to Jack Dee's reluctant beer commercial: "It's not my material . . . ". It worked a treat; it sounds laboured now; in a year, it will look like hieroglyphics.

Unless it comes from a Swift or a Juvenal, satire keeps and travels poorly. As a revival of "Cabaret" opens, remember that the Kander/Ebb musical—and the Isherwood stories it distorts—still appeal because they ignore the actual content of Weimar comedy, apart from broad-brush hints of Nazis on the rise. That makes the achievement of Peter Jelavich in "Berlin Cabaret" (Harvard University Press, £31.95) all the greater. Not only has he written the definitive account of the German capital's club and revue circuit from its origins around 1900 to its terrible coda in the transit camps, where performers would play for chuckling SS commandants before they were sent to their deaths.

He has also polished up some rusty old routines, pinning down ephemera with an acute discussion of the limits of topical comedy. "Satire was unable to fathom Hitler, much less stop him," he notes. In general, Berlin comedy feasted on sex, fashion and consumerism. Only in times of crisis did politics take centre stage. In the dark days around 1930, for instance, Communist Party agitprop troupes with names such as Red Megaphone would tour poor districts with acts that tried to show, say, that Christmas was a bourgeois sham. Dave Spart flourished then as never before—or since.

And he had the authorities rattled. Jelavich quotes amply from the inadvertently droll reports by the Prussian political police. They faithfully sat in clubs under a variety of regimes, on the watch for subversion and obscenity. When a flesh show was suspected of too much indecency, the cop's duties would include scrutiny from the front row.

We know the hideous finale. Politics outdid the stage in nonsense and absurdity. "We don't want higher bread prices!" proclaimed one of those to whom tomorrow belonged. "We don't want lower bread prices! We don't want unchanged bread prices! We want National Socialist bread prices!" How could a mere comedian compete? Over in Vienna, the great satirist Karl Kraus fell silent after 30 years of caustic commentary: "About Hitler, nothing occurs to me." Satire in Berlin did well against the follies of fashion; it always does. The main event left it speechless.

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ENDGAMES: Weekend Competition

No 3306 Set by Leonora Casement
You were asked to write in the style of Mat Coward, but about something he would never write about in a million years.

Report by Ms de Meaner
A lot more difficult than you thought, I'm interested to discover. In fact, picking the topic was where many fell down. For example, Toby Barrett had his Coward sounding off about 20th-century continental philosophy, or "this bollocks", as Toby put it, getting into the swing of things. Philosophy, eh? A little out of Coward's reach, perhaps? I should imagine Mat (it's almost certainly Mr Coward to you, Toby) is getting ready for a bit of knee-capping even as you read this. And I was a little worried about Basil Ransome-Davies' entry, since we all know how attached Mat is to gardening. But, what the hell. A tenner to those printed.

I was talking to my Virginia Creeper last week—it's generally got a more sophisticated line in repartee than, say, the geraniums, which simper and smile and could all use a heavy session of assertiveness training—when I started to hear a lot of stuff I didn't like. It was seriously obscene, and I won't quote it verbatim, but it went along the lines of: "Who do you think you are, you and Victor Lewis-Smith and the other clowns who are making easy bucks ripping off Hunter S Thompson 20 years after?"

It was a shock, I promise you. I've never discussed my conversations with the flora in print since Prince Charles' garden habits became good for a knee-jerk laugh, but this hurt. I mean, we all have feelings.

Anyway, I dried my tears and sought counselling. The clematis has always been good for that—none of this only-you-can-solve-your-problems-Mat shit. Only this time not.

So I solved it the quick way, with an axe. Funny how you can get sap-happy.

Basil Ransome-Davies

What's the difference between a radio telescope and a pressure cooker? Give up? Well, you're obviously the sort of ignorant sniffer-of-John-Patten's-trousers who votes Tory and doesn't know that pressure cookers were invented by a French scientist called Denis Papin (no Spoonerisms please) in 1679, while the radio telescope . . . wasn't. Why have pressure cookers become so rare nowadays? Fifteen years ago you'd visit a friend and they'd be cooking their breakfast in one, their lunch (or do you call it dinner? I still don't know my audience yet) in another. And there'd be yet another pressure cooker on the floor with cat litter in it—"just in case", they'd say, and laugh. And you'd laugh too.

But now, no one seems to put cat litter in their pressure cookers. And I'm sure this is because they no longer *have* pressure cookers. They've all disappeared—gone the way of red telephone boxes and yellow electricity vans. Yes. They've been privatised.

Simon Herbertson

I have been inundated with letters, several in number, demanding to know why I rarely—actually, never—deal with the MCC's outrageous treatment of Gower, the ball-tampering controversy, and similar news, views, and topics of the moment. Does the subject, they wonder, fail to appeal because I cannot drag politics into it?

I find this suggestion hurtful in the extreme. As my mother would readily testify—and as these people would know if they read my stuff at all—I can, when pressed, drag politics into questions as apparently remote as the correct length of time to boil an egg. Today, however, it shall be cricket.

The questions of Gower and the ball-scrapers are related. An unenforceable law is a bad law; ball-scraping will happen; Gower, who is a ringer for the angel Gabriel, will never do it; hence he must go and the remaining rotters be coached in the art.

Now it is as easy to imagine Heseltine with a nutmeg-grater down his trousers as it is impossible in the case of Hurd. Major? Simply the best nutmeg-grater-concealer in history.

Noel Petty

I never suspected that the atrium (no more than a symbolic skylight) at the centre of my bed-sitter was there so that the master's living space might be separated from that of the familia urbana. Silly me, being fresh out of Penge, I had never made the connection. But my lack of familia urbana is something that I intend to remedy.

Seneca suggests that if I want to get up to speed with the Etruscans, I'd need a gobbets-of-phlegm wiper, a good-looking cup-bearer attired like a girl, a roast-fowl slicer, a dough-kneader and a fairly high-quality back-scratcher. And that's just for starters. Maybe I should stick an ad in *Exchange & Mart*. Wanted . . . full set of familia urbana by masterful Kevin Costner lookalike. Of course, I won't let on that they will not be allowed to cough, sneeze, fart, belch or hiccup without my permission, and that they may be required to stand on the slave side of the atrium all night without so much as a squeak. That's small-print stuff, known in our business as Maxwell clauses. Not, of course, to be confused with Santa Clauses, who was not as fat and was appreciably less shitty.

Connie Yapp

GRYPH'S QUIZ

The answers all have something in common

1. Ashlar
2. Workplace
3. Now 'Akko
4. Wild feline
5. Paderewski
6. Understand
7. Sovereign
8. Journalist or Labour leader
9. Quick kiss
10. Alliance

Answers below

No 3309 Set by Eric the Bird
After Christmas come the bills. Verses, please, giving your thoughts as you contemplate them. Entries to be in by 6 January

Quiz answers

All are imperial units of measurement: 1) Stone; 2) Yard; 3) Acre; 4) Ounce; 5) Pole; 6) Fathom; 7) Pound; 8) Foot; 9) Peck; 10) League. NB: 3: East Mediterranean port

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?

Have you sent your New Year greetings yet?

Next week will see the blockbuster eighty page, end of 80th anniversary year *New Statesman & Society*. More important, it is also the first issue of **1994.**

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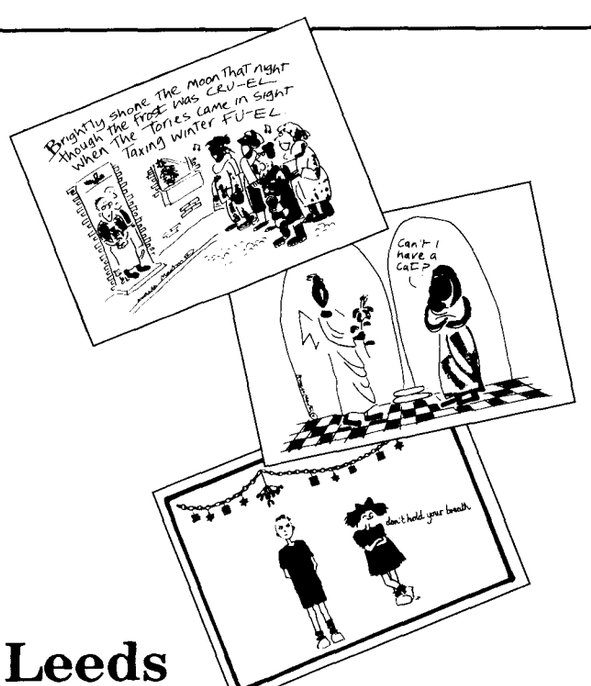
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when the Tories came in sight
taxing winter FU-EL
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CHESS

Three men call themselves world chess champions these days; Kasparov, Karpov and Fischer.

All have some legitimacy. Kasparov beat the man who qualified through the FIDE elimination process to challenge him, although the contest took place outside the auspices of what has always been recognised as the only proper postwar governing body.

Karpov won the FIDE title by beating Timman, and can argue that it was not his fault that Short and Kasparov chose to abandon the FIDE aegis, for motives which they never really seemed to be in agreement about.

Bobby Fischer was denied the right to defend the title he took from Spassky in 1972 under the conditions he stipulated to the 1974 FIDE assembly in Nice. His terms—such as that the match should be of unlimited duration with the winner being the first to score ten wins, and that, in the event of the score reaching 9-9, the challenger must win by a clear two-point margin—were deemed as unacceptably favourable to the champion, and so FIDE vetoed Fischer's suggestion. To their astonishment, he instantly cabled to announce his resignation of the title. In April 1975, Karpov became champion by default.

But Karpov soon got his way by demanding that, in the event of his being defeated in a match of unlimited duration where the winner was the first to record six victories, he should have the automatic right to a return match. This was the proviso that Botvinnik had used to regain the title Smyslov and Tal had respectively taken from him.

The point is that the terms Karpov was granted are demonstrably still *more* mathematically favourable to the defending champion than those that Fischer was denied by FIDE. (It will be recalled that Fischer's 1992 match with Spassky was conducted on precisely these lines.)

FIDE's treatment of Fischer was both bonkers and scandalously unfair, although it should be said that Robert James has never been the easiest of men to do business with. A faction in the United States has pressed for the recognition of Fischer as world champion for some years now, even presenting the US Congress with a motion to that effect. Personally, I find their case most convincing, and feel that at the very least a formal statement from the current FIDE president acknowledging the incorrect handling of this matter is long overdue.

What will be done to resolve this impasse? Directly, I suspect, nothing. For some time to come, I foresee the respective PCA and FIDE bandwagons progressing along approximately parallel paths, exchanging critical broadsides about the other's impropriety and follies, while the detached part of the triumvirate amuses himself in Serbia.

The pantheon of The Holy Grail states that the revival of the sick Fischer King heralds the return of prosperity to a barren kingdom. Well, there is certainly more dosh in the pot than ever before, but no consensus as to who has the right to the lion's share.

One attractive development within the PCA is its refusal to segregate men and women.

For many years, FIDE has awarded special "Women's" titles, for which, of course, the criteria were far less demanding. Nobody was ever able to explain to me why this was done, and neither did the defenders of this weird idea offer an answer to my inquiry: "What is the difference between a woman's Grandmaster title and a woman's chemistry degree or a woman's driving licence?" Instead, they just mumbled something about "positive discrimination". Your positive discriminator is an interesting creature. As Bernard Levin has observed, when confronted with the puzzle, "Hurdles are set at a height of one metre. One hundred schoolchildren attempt to clear them, but only 75 are able to jump higher than a metre. How many children cannot clear the hurdles?", the positive discriminator's answer 'Lower the hurdles.'"

One sees the same sort of well-meaning nonsense afoot when a political party insists that it must have a requisite number of women on its front bench and/or as parliamentary candidates.

Perhaps Bent Larsen and I should contest a match to see who is the strongest diabetic chessplayer in the world?

Such an event could be no more farcical than the recently concluded women's world championship.

Next year's FIDE Olympiad will, as usual, feature a separate event for women, and England will be sending a team. But I only wish that the BCF would follow the PCA's lead, for surely it is a custom more honour'd in the breach than the observance?

James Plaskett

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BACKCHAT

The suspension of democracy would meet little opposition, says **Mat Coward**

All things considered, I think the best we can hope for now is a military coup. It's not exactly the result we've spent our lives agitating for, I admit, but the alternatives are far worse.

A general election and a Labour victory, for instance. Just imagine how awful such a government would be. Completely devoid of ideology—well, that's nothing new, true, but a cabinet made up of the present leadership would also lack any trace of common sense, or even of crude class orientation. It would have achieved its only goal, getting elected, and so would be left with no purpose, no definite intentions, and after a few months spent staggering around in an undignified manner, would trip over its own long face, tumble down an up escalator, and break its neck.

Not that there's much risk of that happening, I think. The chances of there actually being another general election this century must be pretty slight. Apart from anything, who would contest it? There are no political parties left in this country. The Conservative Party, in Britain as in most of Europe, is completely dead, its formerly reliable pool of sheep-like supporters transformed into a kind of well-housed underclass of bitterly militant abstentionists.

The Labour Party, meanwhile, has a nationwide active membership of about three dozen, and voter registration is so low anyway, that even if left-wing, poor and working-class voters had any incentive to turn out—which they haven't—there wouldn't be enough of them available to make a difference. The Liberal Party, of course, has never existed, except as a phantom of the broadcast airwaves, and in the erotic fantasies of the opinion pollsters.

An indefinite suspension of democracy would meet very little opposition these days. The abolition of the GLC was a good dress-rehearsal; if you can abolish a parliament once and get away with it, you can do it again. In any case, few are still fooled by the democratic side-show, and a bomb-dazed population has become immune to shock.

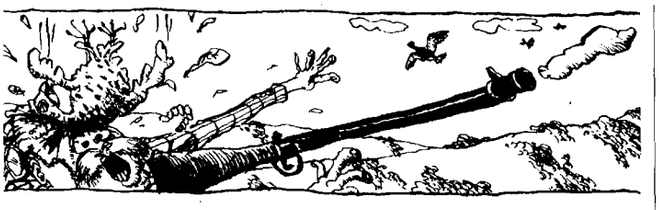
Look at the old-age pension: that, surely, was always the psychological bridge too far, and yet now the bridge hasn't just been crossed, it's been blown up. In the space of a few months, most people have come to accept that the present generation of state pensioners will be the last. Saloon-bar demographics is employed to mask this shameful surrender, but the truth is simply that nothing is unthinkable any more.

A red surge is a possibility, I suppose—the instinct to combine yet survives, and seems stronger now than it was a year or so ago—and I can imagine England going fascist more or less overnight in current conditions, with capitalism having collapsed and socialism having taken voluntary redundancy. But revolutions do not generally make strong roots in starved soil.

Which only leaves the colonels. Either we carry on as we are, which we can't, or the armed forces, themselves declassed, betrayed, and on the verge of abolition, take a hand. A period of strong rule—with state control of industry, a freeze on the export of capital, mass executions of the treacherous and corrupt—might do us a power of good.

So what about it—is it too late for us to make common cause with the military discontents? They should be, after all, our natural allies: "Workers, Peasants, Soldiers and Sailors", remember? I must say, I quite fancy myself as chief clerk to the local soviet, and being seen home on dark evenings by a big, brave Wren.

FORTEANA



Felix Bennett

There is death after death, according to the reports held by **Paul Sieveking**

Some years ago, Jerry Rosenberg was jailed for life in New York for killing two policemen. In 1986, he had open-heart surgery in the prison hospital and "died" for two minutes, before being revived. His lawyer argued that Rosenberg completed his life sentence at that point and should be released. Two years later, a Federal judge ruled that Rosenberg had not "died", according to the legal definition of the term.

You might have supposed that modern medical expertise would be able confidently to diagnose death; mistakes, however, happen all the time. From my bulging file, I draw the following five recent examples:

In September 1991, Troy Smith, 17, passed out after consuming about ten glasses of gin while playing a drinking game with friends in New Haven, Connecticut. The family called fire department paramedics 12 hours later. They checked his pulse and listened with a stethoscope, but found no signs of life and pulled a blanket over his head. Moments later, he began to stir and was rushed to hospital, where he regained consciousness five hours later.

Emma Brady, 75, a retired beautician, was admitted to Palms of Pasadena Hospital in St Petersburg, Florida, on 12 December 1991, after an allergic reaction to a muscle relaxant. She then developed heart and respiratory problems and was given a tracheotomy. On 24 January 1992, there was a flat line on her heart monitor, she had no pulse and was not breathing. She was declared dead and placed in a body bag. Her family arrived an hour later and found her gasping for air. Five days later, she was "critical, but stable".

Mrs Brady later told her daughter, Arlene Walsh: "They wrapped me up like a baby and they were going to take me to the morgue. That night I couldn't breathe. They didn't have to pound on me. All they had to do was give me oxygen. I couldn't talk. I couldn't tell them I was alive." She also said that she saw her long-dead parents, and Jesus Christ, who sent her back. She died finally less than five weeks later.

Jorge Alberto Castillo was declared dead from stab wounds to the heart, but came back to life early in January 1993 as he was being put into a hospital morgue in the northern Honduras city of San Pedro Sula. He was revived with electric shocks before undergoing open heart surgery in order to save him.

Sipho William Mdletshe, 24, from the township of Sebokeng, south of Johannesburg, was declared dead on 13 March 1993, following a car crash, and taken to a mortuary, where he spent two days in a metal box, drifting in and out of consciousness.

He slowly became alert enough to realise he was trapped in the box and began screaming for help. Mortuary workers heard the commotion and freed him. He told the South African *Sunday Times* that he was heartbroken because his fiancée, also injured in the crash, refused to believe his story, and told nurses at the hospital where she is recuperating that he is a zombie returned from the dead to haunt her.

The stiff and cold body of Nancy Vitale, a 40-year-old teacher, was found on the floor of her Brooklyn basement apartment by her landlord at 6.18pm on 14 June 1993, and at 7pm was declared dead by a team from the Emergency Medical Service. "Rigor mortis and dependent lividity had already set in," said an EMS spokesman, indicating the woman's joints were tightening and blood had begun to settle in the lower extremities of her body. "There was no pulse and no blood pressure."

Two hours later, as an investigator began a medical examination to determine the cause of death, he heard a gurgling sound and called an ambulance. Ms Vitale had probably been in a coma for about seven hours as her parents had waited for her on her front porch for three hours from noon, not knowing that she was inside.

Two days later, Ms Vitale, who had apparently taken an overdose of pills after being laid off from her job, was awake and speaking to her parents in Coney Island Hospital. She was discharged not very long after.

Paul Sieveking is editor of "Fortean Times"

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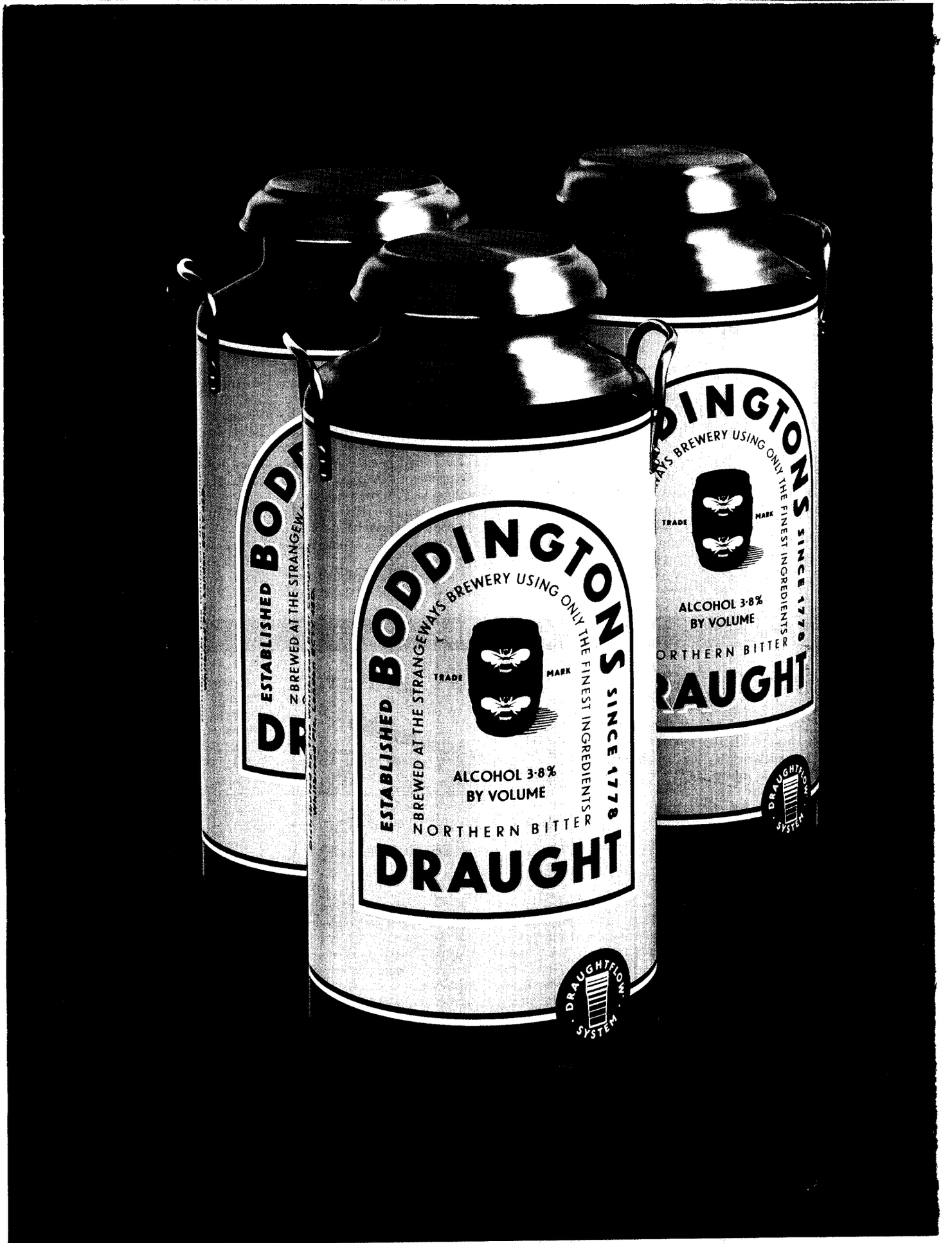

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